Rediscovering India

Dharampal

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Collection of Essays and Speeches (1956-1998)

DHARAMPAL

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SIDH

Dharampal Shodh Peeth

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Foreword

For thousands of years India has fascinated foreign as well as Indian scholars and academicians to go into the annals of her ancient history. Discovery and re-discovery of India has attracted traders, invaders and travelers from far and wide. Indians have every right to be proud of their rich cultural heritage, which spans many a millennium. During its long history, India developed its administrative and local self-governing institutions. Long before establishment of the city-states of Greece, Indian genius forged institutions of sabha-s and samiti-s to govern their grama-s and janapada-s of which we find mention in the Veda-s. Though there is a difference of opinion regarding the exact date of Mahabharata, it is certain that the events depicted therein cover the period ranging from three to four thousand years back. The origin of the state, the kingship and ganatantra-s is described and discussed in this great epic.

As far back as the latter vedic period, we find mention of sreni-s which were guilds of artisans engaged in different trades. As the civilization progressed, cities sprang up at convenient centers. The mahajanapada period which coincides with the advent of Buddhism and Jainism saw the formation of nigam-s and strengthening of sreni-s which played an important role in self-government.

The picture of the Indian society which emerges from Veda-s, Brahamana-s, Upanisada-s, Sutra-s, Jataka-s and other contemporary literatures is of a vibrant and forward-looking people. In course of time, they developed a culture and civilization which harmonized religion, philosophy and science. The universities of Nalanda and Taksila reflected the spirit of search, not only in the field of philosophy but also in physical sciences, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, architecture and a myriad of subjects which concerned the well-being of the human race. Almost all basic principles which contributed to development of modern science were discovered by Indian scholars thousands of years back. In the second century B.C. when most of the Europe was engaged in the barbaric struggle for existence, Indian scholars were developing the system of calculation with zero and decimal. So is the case with Algebra and other branches of the mathematics. Western scholars like N.B. Halhed have acknowledged this contribution of India without reservation.

Unfortunately, there is a section of Indian people, ignorant of its own rich heritage and enamored with the western thought, which tries to ape whatever comes from the West. They need to be reminded that the present India is the outcome of not only of the immediate past but also of the thousands of years of the long history.

Naturally, any meaningful strategy for future development of the country has to be rooted in the genius, innate wisdom and industry of the Indian people. Mahatma Gandhi realized this long ago. Unfortunately, we ignored the inner strength of our people. This is the root cause of many of the ills which the country is facing today.

No doubt, we as a nation passed through periods of decadence and many a time were subjugated by foreign powers. The British historians tried to depict us as backward, ignorant and uncivilized people. It was a calculated deception to establish their central authority and, in the process, it destroyed our ancient institutions of self-government at the local level. The village panchayats, which had survived in some form or the other since the vedic period lost their vitality and became a pale shadow of their past existence. In spite of all this, the value of our heritage could not be minimized.

Shri Dharampal is a man of dignity and grace. As a true Gandhian he has been working for more than four decades to revive the institution of village panchayats, the bedrock of the Indian polity. In the ensuing pages of the present book, which is a collection of his articles written during the last forty years he throws ample light on the working of these institutions prior to advent of the British rule in India. His interest in Indian polity covers a wide range of subjects. Modern science and technology, development of India, backwardness and its causes along with the contemporary politics including the period of emergency do not escape his attention. Churchill's views on Gandhiji's fast offer an interesting reading. Any person interested in refashioning Indian polity will find many valuable hints and insights in the present collection of the articles written by Shri Dharampal. Shri Dharampal's present collection gives a glimpse of the glorious heritage of India. It also depicts our modern problems, provides an insight into today's malaise and gives a clear vision and radiates a powerful incentive to work with courage and cohesion for building a better tomorrow." I'm confident that this book will serve as a pioneer to our thinking people to have greater pride in our past achievements which may serve as a source of inspiration for the future.

Chandra Shekhar

Former Prime Minister of India, October 2003

Preface to First Edition

Getting to know Sri Dharampal, engaging in informal discussions with him, understanding his works and perception has been a most profound experience. It changed our perceptions forever - about Indian society, the West and several other issues and concepts, which are instrumental in understanding India and the World. Later we realized that he has made similar impact on many more who came in contact with him over the last 35 years.

A cursory reading of his works initially results in shock and disbelief, and there is a possibility that the reader may end up rejecting him by reaching very different, perhaps wrong conclusions - viz., he is glorifying the past, he is trying to take us back or that he is against the West. But your perceptions will be wholly different if you were more patient with him and read him with an open mind. Sometimes people also reject him because he is not a "trained" historian or a philosopher and therefore according to them, is not "qualified" to write about such issues. Ironically, the reasons for such a myopic mind-set of the Indian educated classes have been explored and studied in Dharampal's research and writings.

Dharampal sort of stumbled upon and found his mission in life about forty years ago, while studying the workings of the Pancayati Raj system in our villages, when he discovered the existence of traditional panchayats called the bees biswa pancayat. This opened a whole new world in front of him. Another fact which he noticed was the concept of samudayam which existed in over a third of the 5000 villages in the Tanjore region of south India. This and other such information led Dharampal to take up intensive archival work on the period at the beginning of the British domination of India. Being diligent by nature he delved deeper into the late 18th and early 19th century British archival records and started getting convinced that "there was something seriously amiss or disoriented in the functioning of the Indian state and society" and that "the picture of Indian society that we all have is wrong."

He did this research in London at the India Office Library and the British Library. Later on, he visited some thirty other British archives including the National library of Scotland in Edinburgh, the Bodleian in Oxford, major archives in Leeds, Nottingham, Sheffield, Manchester, and several other places. This too largely without any institutional support and without photocopying machines.

Europe's direct contact with India starts with the arrival of Vasco de Gama to Calicut in 1498. India, however, has had intimate contacts with countries of S.E. Asia and with China and Korea and to some extent with Japan from ancient times. Quite some material, in these countries, pertaining to India is fairly known for the past 100 to 200 years, and perhaps was well known to scholars and political people in India a 1000 years ago. India's contacts with central Asia and Tibet also go to ancient times. Similarly, India had fairly close contacts with countries of West Asia and part of the Arab world as also East Africa, perhaps from much before the Christian era. The contacts within India, of one distant region with the other, are well illustrated by texts like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata the Raghuvansa and many other literary works.

Dharampal feels that the real work of knowing India as it has been through the centuries would only start when we begin to look at material in Indian languages. The other material which we could look into profitably is the material written down in East Asian and South East Asian countries, with whom India has had very intimate relationship from very ancient times.

The British contact with India started around 1580 or 1590 with the travel of some British men to India. In 1600 the British formed, what they term, The East India Company trading to the East Indies. In 1617 when the British envoy Sir Thomas Roe visited the Mughal Emperor Jehangir, the British sought Jehangir's permission for establishing commercial and trade centers in a few places in India and after that many more British men and ships began to visit India, both for travel and trade. The visit of Thomas Roe provided the British with some Indian territory – places like Surat, where they established outposts, which were called 'Factories'. From almost the time of their establishments these Factory places began to build small fortifications, big storehouses and created small townships. Texts and documents were generated in these places, for reporting their activities to the authorities in Britain. These can be said to be the beginning of the massive and voluminous British archival records on India, which exist in Britain till today.

Soon after the Factories came the British Presidency towns of Bombay, Madras (Fort St. George) and Calcutta (Fort St. William). These three Presidencies generated much more records and several fair copies of these proceedings began to be sent to the authorities in Britain on a regular basis. The Dutch, the French, the Danes, also established a substantial number of Factories on India's coast, and a few inlands also, during the 17th century.

Around 1748, along with the French or in alleged opposition to them, the British began to occupy large areas of Indian territory around the town of Arcot in northern Tamil Nadu and within about 10 years extended such territorial occupation down to the southern tip of India. Similar territorial occupation started in northern India in the areas of Bengal and Bihar from around June 1757. In 1773 the British Governor of Bengal was made Governor General by the British government. All this meant generation of larger amounts of documents for conveying to Britain.

In 1784 the British parliament passed an Act, which constituted a Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India with a British cabinet minister as its president. Initially the British Prime Minister was also a member of this Board. For most of its 74 years existence (1784-1858), the Board had six members - all of them British privy councilors, out of whom three were cabinet ministers. It was this Board, which governed India from 1784 to 1858, when a British Secretary of State for India replaced it and India began to be formally considered by Britain, a part of the British Empire.

During the 74 years, 1784-1858, while the EIC prepared the initial drafts of all the instructions to be sent to India to any of the governmental departments either at the Presidency or at the India level, it was ultimately the Board of Commissioners, which finalized and approved each and every instruction. But these instructions were formally conveyed to the British governments in India under the signatures of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman and some twenty members of the Court of Directors of the EIC. In a way the job of this Court was similar to that of an Under Secretary today, who conveys governmental instructions under his own signature, in the name of the President of India.

Since a lot of this official material originated in India, it is also to be found in several places in India, as the British created archives at Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Lucknow and perhaps one or two other places, while in Britain the whole of it is available in one place, i.e., in the India Office Library, London.

The India Office Library, London, the British Library and a few other major British archives also hold material on internal discussions on India, amongst the concerned British Prime Ministers and other prominent political personalities in Britain. This important material pertaining to determining of British policy in India is not available in India, as only final decisions got conveyed here.

Another kind of British material comprising largely of the writings on India, mostly after 1600, of private British individuals – as travelers, businessmen or as specialists of various kinds is known as private papers. Such material is only to be found in various archives in Britain, barring copies of some of this material, which may have been brought to India in recent years.

A more important series of private papers, starting from about 1773 when Warren Hastings was made the first Governor General of India, are the correspondence between these Governors General and the authorities in Britain, which from 1784 to 1858 meant the correspondence between the Governors General and the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India.

These papers later became a series in the India Office called the "Boards' Collections". Only a part of them has survived after 1858. Recently the India Office Library has been made a new comprehensive index of the 3,000 bulky volumes of the 'Boards Collections'.

After 1858 not all of the proceedings of the Indian governments were sent to Britain, as the authorities in London no longer needed a large amount of detail. So, from 1858 onwards, the India Office Library in London does not have as much governmental material on matters in India as the archives in India have.

In London, from 1966 to 1982, and during some later visits, Dharampal collected a considerable amount of British archival material. Dharampal's books and the present articles contain some of this material.

As Dharampal was not considered a scholar or a historian and did not even have a University degree, he took up the various researches and studies in his individual capacity. While this work of Dharampal had no formal institutional backing, various friends in India tried to support it. Sri Jayaprakash Narayan was for setting of an institute exclusively devoted to doing the kind of researches and studies, initiated by Dharampal. However, as Sri J.P. Naik, Member Secretary of Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), thought that such an institute was not needed, Sri Jayaprakash Narayan arranged a fellowship from the A.N. Sinha Institute,

Patna to help Dharampal carry on with his work in London. A question about this fellowship and his not having a degree was raised in the Bihar legislature during 1973. Hence at Dharampal's request this fellowship was terminated.

Dharampal's friends however expressed deep interest and much confidence in his work. Amongst them from the beginning were Sri Jayaprakash Narayan, Sri Annasaheb Sahastrabuddhe, Sri R.K. Patil, Sri Ram Swamp, Sri Sita Ram Goel, Sri Radha Krishna (Secretary, Gandhi Peace Foundation), Sri K. Arunachalam, Sri A.B. Chatterji, I.C.S formerly secretary, Ministry of States, Delhi, Professor R. Bhaskaran, and Dr. D.S. Kothari. From about 1977 many younger friends also got interested in Dharampal's study and research material in several places especially in Delhi, Madras, Bangalore, Varanasi, Kanpur, Goa and Sevagram. One major group, who was influenced by Dharampal's researches was the PPST, Madras, which was formed around 1980.

Dharampal has been very careful in his research works not to impute anything or try and interpret history. He has painstakingly reproduced early British records and let these documents speak for themselves. Dharampal feels the documents of this early British period, from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the formative years of British rule in India, give significant inkling into the way Indian society may have functioned and how it must have got disturbed, as well as about the mechanisms which were responsible for this disorientation ofIndian society. This is also the reason for the discomfort of many of our mainstream scholars as they find it hard to reject Dhrampal's findings but at the same time if they start acknowledging Dharampal, then they lose the ground they stand on, and on which they have, over the years, built their reputations, especially in the western academia. So, one good way has been to ignore him.

But one need not bother too much about them. It is important that what Dharampal is saying, the glimpses he gives of the India before the arrival of the British and thus the possibilities of future that he opens up and the support he provides to open new vistas of imagination for us, all this reaches out to a wider section of society, which has almost been captivated into reading material coming only from the West – so much so that, for them, even the most powerful critique of the West also emanates from there.

Over the last 40 years, Dharampal has written several articles, given many talks, read papers in conferences and seminars. These are significantly different from his research work, where he has by and large refrained

from interpretations. These articles are based on the insights gained by him during the painstaking research and from his dwelling on them later on. In these articles, Dharampal is speculative, tries to conjure a picture of what the Indian society may have been like, how it may have functioned, taken its decisions, arranged its affairs, what were its ways of protest etc. before or immediately after the arrival of the British. It also tries to draw a picture of the manner in which the British may have looked at our (alien) ways and how the systems imposed by them must have contributed to disrupting the society. Perhaps for the first time the articles have been collected and put together for readers to get a glimpse into Dharampal's world.

Reading Dharampal becomes a pleasure if one is prepared to be a little more imaginative, philosophical and not afraid to speculate a bit. A little self-awareness about our mode of thinking, the assumptions which we carry within us, all these are helpful while reading Dharampal. Then instead of a struggle, reading him becomes a pleasure and he even manages to infuse courage and hope within us about new and perhaps unimagined possibilities for us. But if our mind is not open, then Dharampal challenges it, which creates discomfort.

The insight we gained from Dharampal has also made it simpler for us to understand "Hind Swaraj" and Mahatma Gandhi. Otherwise, for instance, it would have been difficult to understand and appreciate Mahatma Gandhi's prayer discourse in Ahmadabad on March 17,1918. In this discourse Mahatma Gandhi challenges two of the most venerated leaders of India, at that time, Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and dares to say that both these gentlemen have not "properly understood the soul of India in all its grandeur" and that deep down in their hearts they "would like us to be what the Europeans are." Talking of the Madan Mohan, he says: "he underwent six years internment but only to display courage of the European variety" but "if Tilak ji had undergone the suffering of internment with a spiritual motive, things would not have been as they are, and the results of his internment would have been far different."

There is only one reality, yet all of us perceive it differently, depending on our beliefs and assumptions. The same word may connote different meaning in different times and to different people. These differences in our perception are shaped by our worldview, beliefs and assumptions. Dharampal keeps drawing our attention to this fact repeatedly. He feels 'the British did what was natural for them to do'. We perhaps had a different

theory of polity and social organization, which was difficult for the British to comprehend. Dharampal is not interested in comparisons or in establishing our superiority but in understanding the nature of our social organizations, polity, functioning of our society, nature of our science and technology and in understanding the British mind, their worldview and assumptions. He is not interested in putting blame or in finding faults with anyone or in lamenting over what is past history.

He repeatedly tries to present us with a different perspective. For instance, he believes that "for the British, caste was a great obstacle, an unmitigated evil not because they believed in castelessness or a non-hierarchical system but because it stood in the way of their breaking Indian society... caste did hinder the process of atomization of Indian society and made the task of conquest and governance more difficult. The present fury and theoretical formulation against the organization of Indian society into castes, whatever the justification or otherwise of caste today, thus begins with British rule."

In present times we are so obsessed with the idea of backwardness and development of Indian society. Dharampal goes into the origin of not only these terms but also the imagery they form in our minds today and gives an insight into how these terms may have conveyed something entirely different when we were thus categorized. He feels that "it is a false impression that the early 19th century British usage of terms like 'ignorance' or 'misery' pertain to any socio-economic context. What obtained in the early 19th century Britain was a well-defined hierarchical structure, a rigorous legal system, an administrative and military structure, admission to which was determined by birth, patronage or purchase. To such a mind, the liveliness of ordinary Indian society, its relative cohesive social structure, its educational institutions (admission to which did not depend on wealth), its joint ownership of land, etc. were points not in its favor, but indicated its depravity."

In 1813, a debate concerned with "saving the souls" of the Indian people was instigated by Mr. William Wilberforce. He argued that the "Greece and Rome were wretched until they got converted to Christianity. Therefore, it was impossible that Indians could be either happy or enlightened in their non-Christian state. Mr. Wilberforce concluded that India would remain wretched, depraved and sunk deep in ignorance until it was converted to Christianity."

Dharampal believes, "This was the context, in which the terms

wretched, ignorant, etc. were used to describe religious India. So, Indians were "wretched" in the religious sense (from a Christian viewpoint!) and not in the socio-economic sphere. In fact, socio-economic backwardness may be taken as a post-1800 phenomenon in India." It seems to have been caused by a colossal disorganization of the Indian body politic and by the centralization of authority and resources by the British system.

Another brutal impact of British rule was the decay of the Indian education system, where practically in all spheres of knowledge, there began to be "major lapses of memory, blunting of know-how and technical expertise, and of the fading of memory about the way things were done in the past... and Indians began to be coerced into accepting the new western image of themselves." Thus Indian agriculture, Indian technologies of various kinds, or Indian medicine, which had been highly effective and sophisticated till around 1800 began to be treated as poor, inferior and defective by about 1850.

Dharampal's writings make us understand the Europeans, their minds and their worldview, and attempts to put in proper perspective many "facts" and "truths" about pre-1850 India. But if Indian society was fairly comfortable and in certain sense far superior, then why did they allow themselves to be dominated by the Europeans. As he says, "Indians have always aspired to live in localities and communities in relative harmony, not only with human beings but also with all beings. Western man, on the other hand, is a disrupter and conqueror by his very nature... In a way, it was Plato who realized that the constant state of war between nations represented the European reality and that the aspiration of the European man was to be the supreme conqueror."

The articles, papers presented in various seminars and interviews collected in this book, have been broadly divided into three main sections. The first section deals mainly with Indian society as it was before European domination; the second section is more contemporary, it deals with post-independent India; and the last section gives an insight into understanding the West.

It is my hope that you will enjoy reading this collection as much as I have.

Pawan Kumar Gupta
SIDH, Mussorie (Uttarakhand)
December 2003

Preface to Second Edition

Professor Samdhong Rinpoche, highly revered monk and founding Director (later Vice-Chancellor) of Tibetan Institute of Higher Studies, Sarnath as well as the first elected Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile, makes an important distinction between what he calls an 'ordinary rational mind' and the 'original mind'. While felicitating Dharampalji in an award ceremony jointly organized by the Infinity Foundation and the Centre for Study of Developing Societies in December 2002, he said, "Buddha had an original mind; Dharampalji has an original mind." That is a high tribute coming from a highly learned Rinpoche but also the best way to describe Dharampalji. To put him in any category will be limiting our understanding of the man. He was not even a graduate having left his studies mid-way in 1940, to join Gandhiji's Swaraj movement. So, to call him a Historian, a Gandhian, a Philosopher, would not do justice to him and will obfuscate our understanding of Dharampalji.

Shri Jayprakash Narayan recognized his brilliance very early and persuaded him, in 1958, to become the General Secretary of AVARD (Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development) of which JP was the President. It was here, while studying the functioning of the newly introduced Panchayati Raj system of the Government of India, that he realized the following: namely, that Indian society functioned according to traditional idioms and beliefs, that 'outward-looking' (educated) Indians were completely alienated from the way our 'ordinary' people took their decisions and led their lives, that the educated had no understanding of our indigenous social systems and their dynamics, and that the picture of Indian society that the educated had was all wrong. (He included himself in this deluded educated class)

Perhaps this and other similar experiences led him to undertake the long, intense and arduous research, lasting more than 30 years, in various libraries and archives both in England and in India. He wanted to know how Indian society functioned before the British conquered it.

Dharampalji once said that had he known of or been familiar with any Indian language archival records relating to the beginning of British rule in India or of an earlier period relating to state and society in India, he would rather have looked at such material. But as he or people he knew were not aware of any such material, he started looking at what the British had written about India in the late 18th and early 19th century.

It is difficult to imagine that what Dharampalji discovered in various archives and libraries was not seen by others before him. Gandhiji himself had referred to the existence of such records way back in 1931, while he was in London for the 2nd Round Table Conference. But it was Dharampalji's sharp eye and his ability to see and cull out what others often tend to gloss over or remain oblivious to, perhaps because of generations of indoctrination which has contaminated our perception, that made all the difference – the distinction between the 'original mind' and the 'ordinary rational mind'!

Dharampalji was aware of not only the observed but also the observer. What he observed and read was important, but equally important for him were the context of the times and the background of the author and the lens through which he (the author) perceived the world.

Selections of what Dharampalji discovered in these various archives and libraries have been published in books several times and then reprinted in the 5 volume "Collected Writings" (published in 2000 by OIP, Goa and SIDH, Mussoorie), followed by "Despoliation and Defaming of India" (published by Bharat Peetham, Wardha and OIP, Goa, in 1999) and "British Origin of Cow Slaughter in India" (published by SIDH, Mussoorie in 2002), etc. There still remains much material yet to be published.

Surely during this period, while he was discovering what India was, towards the end of 18th century and early 19th century, and how it functioned, through the records and documents available in these various archives, he must have been pleasantly surprised and impressed to see the richness of this country, its systems and its ability to organize without the intervention of or dependence on the State, and in the process, his initial doubt that we, the educated, do not know this country and its people must have become a conviction. What impressed him most was the relaxed and easy manner in which we were able to organize our collective life – organically and naturally. While going through the archival documents he also discovered not only various speeches and debates like "The British debate on the Christianisation of India 1813" (comprised of the first speech of

William Wilberforce in the British House of Commons "on the duty of Britain to Christianise India", delivered on June 22, 1813, and the second speech on July 1, 1813), and the "Reflections on the Hindoos" by James Mill (1817), as well as Thomas Babington Macaulay's infamous "Minute on Education" (1835), but also important internal correspondences between high officials of the British government in London and those in India. These must have surely pained him and made him angry, but at the same time gave him a deep insight into the working of the British mind and other factors that led to this rapid deterioration in the state of affairs over the next 200 years, so much so that today we find Dharampalji's findings almost unbelievable, almost fictional. There is hardly any evidence on the ground, which is understandable, but sadly we do not even have any recollection of our past. Everything about our past has been wiped out of our memory and we have unknowingly imbibed a false narrative.

Dharampalji's original mind and keen observation helped him understand not only the strategies that were put in place that led to the destruction and despoliation of India, but equally importantly to understand the manner in which the British perceived Indian society, its people and their ways and also the manner in which they perceived and treated their own countrymen in Britain (and Europe), less privileged than their ruling classes. After all, we understand, analyse, and act as we perceive. For instance, the general perception at that time was that a non-Christian society must be uncivilized, a barbaric society! It may seem ridiculous to us today, but not to people like Wilberforce, Macaulay and Bentinck. They "saw" everything with that lens and were convinced about it. This is the trap of perception, of categories, of words, of frameworks that most of us with an 'ordinary rational mind' fall prey to, one way or the other.

"Rediscovering India", being republished after a gap of almost 20 years, is an important book to understand the British mind, their strategies; how India got destroyed; the ramifications of changes brought about by the British knowingly or unknowingly; the shift from one societal system to another imposed by the State. At a deeper level, the book prepares us to formulate some serious questions that we should be asking ourselves today: the narratives and dating systems that we need to challenge today, the areas and directions that we need to examine and follow, the kind of research that we need to undertake today – all these will go a long way to rejuvenate India once again. The book may make you angry, sad or perhaps even a bit depressed, but this is not its intention. As the Nobel Prize winning author

V.S. Naipaul used to say, India is a "wounded civilization". We have been suffering from this inflicted wound, even our high and mighty, though they have learned to deal with this pain by ignoring the root cause and taking sedatives of imitation, hypocrisy and falsehood. But this won't do. If India is to become healthy, it has to acknowledge the wound and work towards healing it. "Rediscovering India" helps in the diagnosis of this long festering wound and points towards the path to a healthy India.

Last time when we published the book, in our enthusiasm, we made a few mistakes. A few editing errors remained in the book, the font size was too small, the notes were at the end of the chapter, making it very tedious for the reader to go through them without disrupting the flow. We have tried to correct these mistakes. We are extremely grateful to Dr. Harsh Satya for meticulously going through the book and making these important corrections. We are also indebted to the co-editor Professor Gita Dharampal for making some very helpful suggestions. Amitabh Kumar offered to design the book cover and has done a marvellous job. We are also very grateful to the Dharampal Shodhpeeth, Bhopal and its Chairperson, Ms. Usha Thakur (Minister of Culture, Tourism and Adhyatam, Government of Madhya Pradesh), Vice Chairperson, Mr. Sheo Shekhar Shukla IAS (Principal Secretary, Department of Culture and tourism, Government of Madhya Pradesh) and to its Director, Prof. Santosh Kumar Verma who have given valuable support in bringing out this publication. We also would like to express our gratitude the Sri Dinesh Kothari of Banyan Tree, Indore who has been extremely supportive and worked hard to bring out this new edition.

Pawan Kumar Gupta
February 14, 2022
SIDH, Mussoorie - 248179

PART-1

Indian Society at the Beginning of European Dominance and the Process of Impoverishment

1

India Must Rediscover Itself

[An interview by Dr. G.S.R. Krishnan. Published in *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore, March 1983]

Krishnan: Forgive me for asking a rather naive question. Could you tell me how, and why you took a keen interest in the functioning of pre-British Indian society, especially of the late eighteenth century. I am asking this because, I understand, you are not an academic scholar/researcher by training or by profession.

Dharampal: This has to be explained in terms of my long association with the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD). I was its Secretary from 1958 to 1964. AVARD was interested in studying the working of the Pancayata Raja system in our villages. Working with and for AVARD I came to realize that Indian society, by and large, functioned according to traditional idioms and beliefs and that I, like many other 'outward-looking' Indians, was not aware of the indigenous social system and its dynamics.

I shall give you a concrete instance of this. I visited a village in Rajasthan as a member of a team to study the working of the *panchayat*. We found that the *panchayat* had constructed a new building. When we went through the *panchayat* records and proceedings, there was no mention about the decision to construct a new building for the village *panchayat*. On inquiry, we were informed that the decision to construct a building was taken at what they called *bees biswa pancayat* (20 parts *panchayat*), an 'unofficial' panchayat along traditional lines which was more representative of the village than the statutory panchayat.

This was an interesting case of how the villagers perceived certain things and how they reacted to things from outside. It also showed how little we knew about our villages. I had similar experiences in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu andother places. Between 1963-1965, we undertook

a study of the working of the *panchayat* system in Tamil Nadu. I visited several districts of Tamil Nadu, talking to knowledgeable people and holding discussions with panchayat leaders. In Tanjore, I met the chairman of the local Bharat Sevak samaja. He told me about the existence of over 100 *samudayam* villages in Tanjore area even around 1937. *Samudayam* villages are those in which while members had specific shares in the land of the village, the land, which any of them cultivated, was changed from time to time and the whole land vested in the village community. Such a change was based on the assumption that a certain alteration occurs in the fertility of all land from time to time which creates inequality among the members of the community and hence occasional redistribution was considered necessary.

When I went through the revenue records and other reports, I found that in the district of Tanjore around 30 per cent of the villages were classed as *samudayam* villages in 1807. The more I went into the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century records, the more I was convinced that the picture of Indian society that we all have is wrong. Someone had to go through the late eighteenth century British records and I thought I should begin and do whatever I can.

Krishnan: So you were not looking into any specific aspect of pre-British Indian society?

Dharampal: I was interested in having an accurate picture, as far as possible, of Indian society before the British conquered it.

Krishnan: But I think most of your work is on the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century Indian society, as seen through British reports/records. Would it be proper to call it pre-British Indian society?

Dharampal: True. My work is on the late eighteenth century period because I could get source material only for that period. Further, as I was interested in the impact of the British rule on Indian society, I had to start with the British occupation of India, which became a reality around 1750. Systematic record keeping began only from 1750 or so because the British officials were not only required to, but even encouraged to, file detailed reports about what they saw and heard, for their masters in England. I must say that the material available for the period 1750-1830 is very detailed and more informative than the records after 1850 or so. During the earlier period British reporting is more free and full of details. Maybe once the British Government had the necessary basic information about

India and as their hold on India tightened, officials were asked to furnish information in a prescribed format.

Krishnan: Or was it due to the changeover from the East India Company rule to the direct British rule of India?

Dharampal: I think this distinction between the East India Company rule and the British rule is a bogus one. In fact from 1784 onwards, the East India Company had very little to do with the making of any decision about India. The job of decision making and in many instances even the drafting of the more crucial detailed instructions became a responsibility of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India, set up by an Act of the British Parliament in 1784. The change which was brought about in 1858 was the elimination of the essentially clerical role of the company and entrusting this task also to an expanded establishment called the Department of the Secretary of State of India. This means, it was not the East India Company which ruled India up to 1858. The British Government had full control over the affairs of the Company from 1784 itself and so the distinction is neither valid nor useful.

Krishnan: Let me ask a different question. Why was it easy for the British to subjugate this country? What factors in pre-British Indian society were responsible for it?

Dharampal: Let me make one thing clear. I really do not know much about the pre-British Indian society, its strength and weaknesses. My knowledge is only about the late eighteenth century India, that too gathered from British records and other sources. More data is needed before one can answer questions about pre-British Indian society. But I can say this much. Around 1700 there was a breakdown of the central authority of the Mughals in India. What followed was a period of great political resurgence. In many parts of India, local rulers – the *Raja-s* and princes – began asserting their rights. But this political resurgence was too slow and weak in relation to the imperial force of the British and other European powers, like the French. And when the British began step by step to conquer the country, these rulers were not able to unite and fight.

Krishnan: Was it that Indian feudalism could not withstand the attack from a nascent capitalist social organisation...

Dharampal: I don't know if we had feudalism. I say this because behind these labels are hidden several assumptions about the nature of social organisation. For instance, when we say the central authority of the

Mughals, it is immediately taken as a centralised state and so on. I saw a letter written by Aurangazeb to his grandson. The letter states two things: (a) that the exchequer receipts in Jehangir's time was Rs. 60 lakhs and the expenditure was Rs. 1.5 crore. So there was a deficit and this was met from the savings which Akbar had left; (b) that Shahjehan, who followed Jehangir, increased the receipts to Rs. 1.5 crore and reduced the expenditure to Rs 1 crore. But estimates of the total revenue during the Mughal period are between Rs. 10 crores and Rs. 20 crores. If only a small portion of the total revenue was received by the emperor, what happened to the rest of the revenue. I think all historians are convinced that even during the reign of Aurangazeb the maximum exchequer receipts never exceeded 20 per cent of the claimed revenue of the empire. The usual explanation is that the remaining 80 per cent was distributed among the feudal lords. My surmise is that the overwhelming proportion of revenue was left at the local level itself, to be spent on activities, prescribed by age-old customs, such as running of *choultri*-s or *chatram*-s, *pathasala*-s or schools, maintenance of tanks etc., grants to temples and other religious activities, honorarium to scholars, poets, medical-men, astrologers, magicians etc. This must have been a very ancient arrangement which was followed even during the Mughal period. But when the British came they step by step started collecting 50 per cent to 60 per cent of the gross produce as revenue from all sources and one can imagine the consequences. It took away all the surplus that our villagers had, and as a result they could no longer maintain *chatram*-s or temples, tanks or schools.

Krishnan: Do you mean the British did this consciously?

Dharampal: The British did what was natural for them to do. In England the peasants paid over 50 per cent of their produce to the landlords and coming to the conclusion that as conquerors they owned all land, etc., the British imposed the same on us. It is not that they invented it for India. Wherever they went they did the same thing. Probably the British thought that it was the right thing to do, because they had a concept of state and society which was a centralised one. This goes back to almost 1,000 years and was not because of the coming of capitalism in England. For instance, after the Norman conquest in around 1100 A.D., nearly 95 per cent of the resources of England were gathered and distributed among the conquerors, that is the king the established churches and the new nobility.

Krishnan: Would you then say that India in 1750 or earlier was much better than England? What was the condition of the common man in India?

Dharampal: I am not very sure if, on the basis of the available data, one can compare the two societies. But there are certain facts that give us a very different picture of Indian society. For instance, the question of agricultural productivity and wages in India was discussed in Britain, in the *Edinburgh Review* of July 1804. On comparison it was found that the productivity in India was several times higher than in Britain. What surprised the British even more was the finding that the wages of the Indian agricultural labourer in real terms were substantially higher than his counterpart in Britain.

It was even remarked that if they were high at the time (1800) when the Indian economy was on a decline, how much higher such wages must have been earlier? Or look at the data on the consumption pattern around 1806 from the district of Bellary. British authorities were concerned with estimating the total consumption of the people of the district and indicating the detailed consumption pattern of three categories of families (these categories were introduced by the British). The quantity of foodgrains estimated to have been consumed in all the three categories was the same, that is half seer of grain per person per day. There were 23 other items like pulses, ghee, oil, coconuts, vegetables, betel nuts, etc. The total per capita per annum consumption was estimated at Rs. 17 for those in the first category, Rs. 9 for those in the second category and Rs. 7 for those in the third category.

In Tanjore in 1805, the number of *mirasdar*-s (those with permanent rights in land) was put at 62,000 of which 42,000 belonged to the *sudra*-s and castes below them. In the Baramahals (the present Salem district) the number of cultivators of the group termed *pariah* was estimated at 32,474 out of a total population of around 6 lakhs. In 1799, in Chingleput district, the number of *mirasdar-s* actually listed was 8,300 and the collector was of the view that the actual number was ten times more. If one looks deep enough, corresponding images of other aspects of Indian life and society emerge from British records of the late eighteenth century. For example. Mr. Alexander Read, who originated the Madras land revenue system said that the only noticeable difference between the nobility and servants in Hyderabad around 1780 was that the clothes of the former were more clean.

Krishnan: I think your forthcoming book on education in pre-British India has some interesting facts.[1]

Dharampal: Yes. For instance, a detailed survey of the surviving indigenous system of education was carried out in the Madras Presidency during 1922-1925. The survey indicated that 11,575 schools and 1,094 colleges were still then in existence in the Presidency and that the number of students were 1,57,195 and 5,431 respectively. The much more surprising information this survey provided is with regard to the broader caste composition of the students in the schools. According to it those belonging to the *sudra*-s and castes below them formed 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the total students in Tamil-speaking areas; 62 per cent in the Oriya areas; 54 per cent in the Malayalam Speaking areas; and 35 per cent to 40 per cent in Telugu-speaking areas. The Governor of Madras further estimated that over 25 per cent of the boys of the school-going age were attending these schools and that a substantial proportion were receiving education at home. In Madras about 26,000 boys were receiving their education at home and about 5,500 were attending schools. In Malabar, the number of those engaged in college level studies at home was about 1,600 as compared to a mere 75 in a college run by the family of the then impoverished *Samudrin Raja*. Again, in the district of Malabar the number of Muslim girls attending schools was surprisingly large, 1,122 girls as compared to 3,196 Muslim boys. Incidentally, the number of Muslim girls attending school there 60 years later, in 1884-1885, was just 700 or so. I have reproduced most of the documents in my book. A number of our notions about education in pre-British Indian society have to be discarded in the light of these British reports and surveys.

Krishnan: Your book "Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century"[2] is a remarkable piece of work. How did you get the material you have reproduced there? How did our scholars and scientists react to your work?

Dharampal: As I said earlier, I was not really looking for material on science and technology or education in pre-British India. It so happened

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[1]This book was published in 1983 by Biblia Impex, New Delhi, entitled *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century*. After being out of print for quite some time, it has been published as *Dharampal Collected Writings Vol. III*, by Other India Press, Goa.

[2]Republished as *Dharampal Collected Writings, Vol. I*, Other India Press, Goa.

that when I was going through material on various aspects of Indian society of this period, I also came across some material on science and technology. Apart from giving an understanding about the nature of our science and technology, this material revealed a lot about the nature of our social organisation. I started gathering some more material and my friends insisted that I should publish the material on science and technology, nothing else. So it was published. Some top people in the science establishment admitted in private conversations that what I have argued seemed correct. But strangely not a single serious review was published on this work in any leading journal in India.

Krishnan: Would you like to highlight some of our achievements in science and technology?

Dharampal: Take astronomy and mathematics. There is an interesting paper by Sir Robert Barker, who was the British Commander-in-Chief in Bengal and later a member of British Parliament, on the famous observatory at Benaras. In fact, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* till its 1823 edition considered this observatory as one of the five celebrated observatories of the world. There is a paper, published in 1790, by John Playfair, FRS and Professor of Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh. Playfair's paper is actually a detailed review of a book, the famous French historian of astronomy, Bailly, wrote on Indian astronomy.

Around the same year, a paper by Ruben Burrow on Binomial Theorem was published. Then we have the account of Le Gentil who was an assistant to the famous Cassini, about how the Tamils calculated the eclipse, without pen and pencil, computing with shells on the basis of memorised tables. Regarding technology there are many papers that speak of our excellent agricultural techniques.

There is a big report by Col. Alexander Walker written around 1820, on the agriculture in Malabar and Gujarat. There is a very interesting paper on inoculation against small pox written by Holwell, who himself was a medical man and was for a short period Governor of Bengal. He described in great detail the practice of inoculation in Bengal and other areas. The British banned the Indian method of inoculation against small pox in 1802-1803.

There is a paper by Capt. Halcott on the drill plough employed in south India. He has said that he never imagined a drill plough, considered as a modern European invention, at work in remote villages in India. He

also described the construction of the drill plough as very simple and neat. There are accounts of the Indian process of making steel which was called 'wootz'. The British experts who examined samples of 'wootz' sent to them by one Dr. Helenus Scott have commented that it is decidedly superior compared to any other steel they have seen. There are also accounts of ice-making, paper making, and making of mortar.

Krishnan: But there were also Britishers who described India and Indians as wretched, miserable ignorant and so on.

Dharampal: I think it is a false impression that the early nineteenth century British mind was in any sense concerned with economic or social backwardness of India and that its usage of terms like 'ignorance', 'misery', pertain to any socio-economic context. What obtained in the early nineteenth century Britain were a well-defined hierarchical structure, a rigorous legal system, an administrative and military structure admission to which was based on birth, patronage or purchase. To such a mind the liveliness of ordinary Indian society, its relative cohesive social structure, its educational institutions, admission to which did not depend on wealth, its joint ownership of land, etc. were points not in its favour but elements which indicated its depravity and laxity.

There was a debate in the House of Commons in 1813. Many members were of the view that the people of India and the Indian society (in spite of the turmoil and disorganisation it was passing through) were still to be envied for their enlightened manners, their tolerance, their social cohesiveness and their relative prosperity. The debate was primarily concerned with the saving of the soul of the Indian people and its main mover was the great nineteenth century Englishman, Mr. William Wilberforce. He argued that Greece and Rome were wretched till they got converted to Christianity. Therefore, it was impossible that the Indians could be happy, enlightened, in their unchristian state. Mr. Wilberforce concluded that India must be wretched, depraved and sunk deep in ignorance till they could become Christians.

So, I believe the terms wretched, ignorant, etc. were used to describe religious India. Indians were more religious than socio-economic. In fact, socio-economic backwardness may be taken as a post-1800 phenomenon in India. It seems to have been caused by a colossal disorganisation of the Indian body-politic and by the centralisation of authority and resources by the British system. The result was that for the next hundred years such authority and the ever increasing resources it began to command was

applied to the purpose of further conquests, including areas extending up to China and St. Helena. It was also used in the erection and maintenance of the new metropolises and the military cantonments and the export of maximum possible revenue for the larger purposes of the British economy. But once disorganisation, impoverishment and subjugation had gone far enough and could not go any further without having adverse effects on the total revenue receipts, the whole of Indian society was placed under a sort of freeze and it became the task of scholarship to establish that such impoverishment and disorganisation had been endemic to Indian culture.

Krishnan: But there certainly was something in Indian culture which prevented us from resisting the British in a big way. Was it our passivity or tolerance?

Dharampal: The surface appearance of this society is of lethargy, of exhaustion, of seeming sloth or to put it differently, of tolerance and passivity. But there seem to have been deep feelings of justice and injustice, of righteousness and unrighteousness, of an undercurrent of pulsating activity beneath the surface passivity. A moral sense about things seem to have been deeply entrenched. When it seems to have been violated there was recourse to opposition, to protest, to peasant movements and even what may be called civil disobedience.

For example, around 1803, the assistant collector of the principal collector of Canara reported that things were getting worse, that 11,000 persons met at a place called Yenoor and avowed their determination not to pay taxes and that about 300 *ryots* entered the *tehsildar's* office and complained about the oppressive stamp regulation, salt and tobacco monopolies etc. The assistant collector also stated that the villagers have excommunicated a person who commenced paying *kista*-s and that the ferment had reached Baroor and might soon reach Cundapoor.

There were protest movements against the imposition by the British of a tax on houses and shops in 1810-11. The tax was introduced in the Bengal presidency areas in October 1810. It was opposed by the people of Varanasi (Benaras), Patna, Bhagalpur, Murshidabad and Sarun. The district collector and magistrate of Varanasi have in their dispatches to the Governor General in Council at Fort William, Calcutta, given detailed accounts of the movement against the house tax. For instance, the collector says that the whole city has stopped all work for days together creating a situation that not even the dead could be cremated and had to be cast in the river Ganga without the performance of customary rites.

According to him over 20,000 persons had been continually sitting in *dharna*, while another estimate placed the number of people collected between Secrole and the city at over 2 lakhs. But it may be true, Indians were not equal to the British in military organisation, or the management of centralised systems.

Krishnan: You have argued (in "Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition)"[3] that civil disobedience is a very ancient Indian method of protest against injustice. Was Gandhiji aware of this tradition?

Dharampal: There are two views about the origin of non-cooperation and civil disobedience initiated by Mahatma Gandhi. One view says that Gandhiji learnt it from Thoreau and Ruskin. According to the other view it was Mahatma Gandhi's own unique discovery. Mahatma Gandhi provides indication of his primary inspiration in *Hind Swaraj*. Gandhiji has written that the view that we should obey laws whether good or bad, is a modern one and that there was no such thing in former days. He also said that we in India generally used passive resistance in all departments of life and gave an instance of such non-cooperation in a small kingdom in Saurashtra in which the villagers offended by some order issued by the prince immediately began vacating the village. The prince admitted his error and there was a reconciliation.

I am not saying that Mahatma Gandhi's discovery of civil disobedience was simply borrowed from Indian tradition. In a way it must have come out of his own being. Maybe, his knowledge of its advocacy in the West provided him additional confirmation. But I think it is the Indian tradition of non-cooperation which made its application on a large scale possible under his leadership. It appears that Gandhiji had a more correct idea of the ruler-ruled relationship in India than the historians. Even without going very far back into Indian tradition or history, a systematic search of Indian and British materials of the eighteenth and nineteenth century provides ample evidence of the correctness of Gandhiji's view. My book on civil disobedience is an attempt in that direction.

Krishnan: It is quite interesting and means that we, in India, had a different theory of polity which did not grant the ruler or the king absolute power.

Dharampal: Yes, in *Mahabharata* it is stated that the people should gird

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[3]Republished as *Dharampal Collected Writings, Vol. II*, Other India Press, Goa.

themselves up and kill a cruel king who does not protect his subjects, who extracts taxes and robs them of their wealth etc. Such a king is considered *kali* or the evil incarnate. It is further said that such a king should be killed like a dog that is afflicted with madness.

Krishnan: But we had several kings who were evil incarnate.....

Dharampal: Of course. We are talking only about political theory. But, I believe, in the West the king had absolute power, I mean in theory.

Krishnan: But how did the view that the king in Hindu polity is a tyrant gain currency?

Dharampal: May be the behaviour of our princes during the British rule created such an impression. I think it is more because of lack of sufficient knowledge about our history and culture.

Krishnan: What do you say about the caste system? I suppose you would not say that the problem of caste is only a post-1800 one. I feel caste poses a lot of problems when we begin defending our tradition.

Dharampal: You are right. Caste seems to be the major symbol of India's backwardness. But how have we arrived at such a conclusion? Like villages, castes have been invariable constituents of Indian society throughout history. It is true that according to *Manusmrti-c*, society in India was at a certain stage divided into four *varna-s*. But while castes and tribes have existed in India and continue to exist today, never before in history do they seem to have posed a major problem.

Historically they have existed side by side, they have interacted among themselves, groups of them have had ritual or real fights with each other and so on. Contrary to accepted assumptions and perhaps to *Manusmrti-c* law, when the British began to conquer India, the majority of Raja-s had been from the *sudra varna*. It is possible that the existence of separate castes and tribes have historically been responsible for the relative weakness of Indian polity. On the other hand it can also be argued that the existence of castes added to the tenacity of Indian society, to its capacity to survive, and to be able to stand up again. Under what circumstances and what arrangements castes are divisive of Indian society or lead to its cohesion are questions which still have no conclusive answer.

For the British, caste was a great obstacle, an unmitigated evil not because they believed in castelessness or a non-hierarchical system but because it stood in the way of their breaking Indian society. I think caste did

hinder the process of atomisation of Indian society and made the task of conquest and governance more difficult. The present fury and theoretical formulation against the organisation of Indian society into castes, whatever the justification or otherwise of caste today, thus begins with British rule.

Krishnan: But did not British rule bring about a feeling of nationalism or at least, that is what our textbooks say.

Dharampal: First of all, whether India should remain a unified nation state is itself a difficult question to answer. India remains India not because of the centralised rule, but because of the unity of our culture. There are any number of instances of Indian villagers, assumed to be illiterate and ignorant people going on pilgrimage from north to south or south to north. There are villages in the Himalayas which are Tamil settlements known as *patti-s*.

I think the period from 1750-1947 is largely a dead period in Indian history. This may be an extreme statement. But I think it is true. Ultimately this period should be written off. Nothing was achieved in this period, in terms of creativity or originality. On the contrary people have suffered in every respect and became lesser human beings.

Krishnan: One last question. What is the relevance of looking back at our tradition. Do you think a reversal of the process is possible, even if it is desirable?

Dharampal: I think the solution lies in the reversal of the process which brought about our present problems. To an extent a reversal did begin to happen, especially at the psychological and conceptual levels under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. His concept of *swadesi*, in fact, dealt even with the ethnocentric aspect of the term 'backwardness'. But evidently it did not get far.

The alien moorings and structuring of the Indian political administrative system are not attracted to it. To them what happened to India during British rule, while regrettable, represents an irreversible process of history. If what has happened in the West has universal validity and all cultures and civilisations must pass through such a process, then what India has to do is already charted out. In fact, that is what has been taking place in India during the last three decades or so, in the name of development or planning. If we are convinced of such inevitability, the best course will be to accelerate the process of the atomisation of Indian society and bring the millennium sooner.

But if we believe that culture and civilisations can renew themselves only through ways which have their source in their own psyche, then we have to make a great spiritual and intellectual effort to come into our own. One has to fall back on what may be called by a blanket term 'indigenous resources' and demolish what has to be demolished, save what could be saved.

It is not necessary that all experience of others in the achievement of similar tasks has to be shunned. When properly analysed and digested such experience may be very valuable. Also, such renewal and restructuring would require considerable redistribution of the capital resources and wealth within India. That is, a movement of resources and incomes from the metropolis to the areas where such resources had originally arisen. Such transfers may also have to happen on an international level. But such transfers, if they happen, will be in the nature of reparations rather than charity and aid, and thus will have a different psychological impact.

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Determining India's Future

Some British documents on British policy towards India, 1942-43

[A comment on India: *The Transfer of Power, Vol. I, II and III (January 1942 to June 1943)*, HMSO, London][1]

The saga of struggles against British Rule in India, like the rule itself, are now part of history. Yet for those who participated or witnessed it, the 'Quit India Movement' was for them the most memorable of them all. This seems true not only for the supporters and sympathisers of this movement but also for its adversaries. Linlithgow, the British Viceroy of the time writing to Churchill on August 31, 1942, characterised it as "by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857, the gravity and extent of which we have so far concealed from the world for reasons of military security."

While there have appeared many studies on the events of 1857, little has been written on the 'Quit India Movement' and its origins and aftermath. Partly this may be because the movement was soon after succeeded by an event of a greater and lasting consequence, the very end of British Rule in India. But the more likely cause of the lack of attention is the inaccessibility of material, both governmental and private, relating to this period for purposes of research.

In the situation as it is and however selective the documents, the publication of India: *The Transfer of Power 1942-47* (Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London), the first three volumes of which have so far (1970-72) been published, is a valuable contribution towards a study and understanding of this period. One wishes that the Indian counterpart of these documents, that is the papers of the Indian National Congress and its leaders, of the Muslim League, as also of the various other parties and personalities pertaining to this period could similarly be arranged, edited and published

[1]It was first published in *Mainstream*, Delhi, July 8, 1972

for the public view.

In 1937, the Indian National Congress had decided to contest the elections to the provincial legislatures held under the Government of India Act of 1935. The Congress won overwhelming majorities in most provinces of India and after some negotiations and the establishment of certain conventions as to the mutual relations between the Governor and the elected ministries, agreed to form Governments in them. After the start of the war in September 1939, these Ministries, however, resigned *in bloc* because the people of India, though they sympathized with Britain, France, Poland etc. and were against Nazi Germany and Fascist aggression, had not been consulted at all before they were made a party to it.

These resignations were followed by mutual recriminations and bitterness between the Indian National Movement and the ruling British authorities. On August 8, 1940, came the well-known British statement (issued by Viceroy Linlithgow) affirming that, "Dominion status was their objective for India", that when the time for the new Indian state came they would not "be parties to the coercion of such elements" which did not wish to be in the new state (thus indirectly conceding the possibility of the division of India), that the Viceroy was authorised to expand his Executive Council and also "to establish a War Advisory Council", but added that all constitutional change had to await the end of the war. This British offer was rejected by the Indian National Congress as it was "a denial of India's natural right to freedom", and suppressed "the free expression of public opinion" and soon after the Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi launched the individual civil disobedience movement.

The entry of Japan into the war in December 1941 as an ally of Germany made the British position in India and more so in Burma, Malaya, Singapore, etc., really critical. This and other events led to the release of the Congress leaders and others arrested during the previous year, starting a fresh bout of negotiations between the various parties. Because of the wider implications of the situation, China, USA, and other powers (besides the British and the Indians) also became interested in a political settlement in India.

The first volume of these documents opens with January 1, 1942. The main events covered in these three volumes relate to Chiang Kai-Shek's visit to India (February 1942), the Cripps Mission (March-April 1942), the preparation for, and aftermath of, the Quit India Movement (May 1942 onwards), Mahatma Gandhi's fast (February-March 1943), and finally the

British response to China's and the international community's sympathy and support for Indian freedom.

What would strike the reader most in these documents is the astuteness of British policy in what are considered as long-term British interests and the dogged way the British stuck to their basic stand amidst the various turns and twists of getting their view across. Not withstanding difference in ideology and outlook, there seems to have been a basic unity amongst all political elements in Britain regarding Britain's Indian policy and objectives. It is in this context that in the views of L.S. Amery, Secretary of State for India, Clement Attlee was as good as Anthony Eden as a successor to Linlithgow for the job of the British Viceroy in India. Whatever little division there was on the Indian policy seems to have cut across party lines.

Another point which may be noted at this stage is regarding the future division of India. The August 8, 1940 statement by the British Government had in fact the stamp of authority on the idea of secession. The proposals which Cripps carried to India while confirming the earlier stand gave it a more concrete shape and as mentioned by Amery to the Private Secretary to King George VI was "the first public admission" by the British "of the possibility of Pakistan, that is, an India divided between the Moslem and Hindu parties."[2]

Further, it is not only the British who had, regrettably or otherwise, accepted, the idea of the division of India but the way this was to happen and the shape such division would take had been foreseen by Mr. Jinnah as also the Sikhs, the latter having had most to suffer from such division. Expounding his ideas to the Governor of Bombay and Coupland, etc. Jinnah stated that "as long as the Muslims only had a small majority over other communities" they would always have to have, as happened in Punjab from 1937 onwards, "a compromising attitude" towards the other communities and therefore, "in framing his Pakistan scheme he excluded from that Muslim zone [that is, the later West Pakistan] the predominant Hindu area centring on Ambala. The Muslims, according to his plan, would have 75 per cent of the population, and they would be able to form a strong Muslim Government." Reverting to the necessity of the bifurcating of provinces he asserted "that it was necessary for the Muslims to have an overwhelming majority in their zones, instead of the precarious majorities which they had

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[2] *India: The Transfer of Power, Vol. I,* p.208 HMSO, London

in the present artificial provinces."[3]

Similarly if division came, the Sikhs, according to Cripps, wanted "a new province consisting of the Ambala and Jullundur divisions together with the Amritsar, Gurdaspur and Lahore districts."[4] The Sikhs further stated in their memorandum to Cripps that "they would certainly not submit to the domination of a community which is bent upon breaking the unity of India and imposing their personal laws and culture on the other sections of the population."[5]

The only new thing which happened during the partition in 1947 was the actual enactment of these ideas.

Chiang Kai-Shek's Visit

An important revelation of these documents is the extent of the support which China through its then President, ChiangKai-Shek, gave to the Indian cause and the manner in which it was countered by the British Government. The first occasion for such public support was the visit to India in February 1942 of President and Madame Chiang Kai-Shek and their insistent wish to call upon Mahatma Gandhi at Sevagram and their declining to stay at the Viceroy's House.[6] While the latter wish was reluctantly conceded, the visit to Sevagram could under no circumstances be countenanced. Writing to Chiang, Churchill stated, "that your suggested visit to Mr. Gandhi at Wardha might impede the desire we have for rallying all India to the war effort against Japan" and hoped, "that your Excellency will be so very kind as not to press the matter contrary to the wishes of the Viceroy or the King-Emperor."[7]

In case the Chiangs still persisted in their intention, the Viceroy "had taken steps", as he reported to Amery "to prevent the Generalissimo from obtaining transport to Wardha whether by train, air or road". And Linlithgow added "at whatever risk of offending his feelings, it is my firm intention to compel him to respect my wishes in this regard."[8] Finally, the meeting with Gandhiji was arranged at Shantiniketan, which, as Amery

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[3]*India: The Transfer of Power, Vol. I,* p.13 HMSO, London
[4]*India: The Transfer of Power, Vol. II,* p.227 HMSO, London
[5]*India: The Transfer of Power, Vol. I,* p.467 HMSO, London
[6]Ibid.Vol I. p.55
[7]Ibid.Vol I. p.104
[8]Ibid.Vol I. p.99

told Churchill, "has always been thought well of by the authorities."[9]

The Generalissimo in his public message on the eve of their departure still hoped "that our ally Great Britain without waiting for any demands on parts of people of India will as speedily as possible give them real political power so that they may be in position further to develop their spiritual and material strength."[10]

Cripps Mission

Though not altogether but in a substantial way, it is the Chiangs' support to the Indian freedom movement that seems to have led to the March 1942 Cripps Mission to Delhi. In fact, at one stage Churchill thought of broadcasting such an offer while the Chiangs were still in India.[11]

Other factors leading to the Cripps visit were (i) the mounting press and public pressure in Britain itself to conciliate India,[12] (ii) the situation of near-panic amongst the British in south-east Asia,[13] and (iii) lastly, the reasoning of men like Attlee that "to mark time is to lose India" and as to save India for the Empire as "Lord Durham saved Canada to the British Empire. We need a man to do in India what Durham did in Canada."[14]

This line of reasoning seems to have been widely shared in the governing circles and even several months after the failure of the Cripps Mission, President Roosevelt of the USA felt that the British and the US "should try to think of some arrangement by which India found its place in the European and American, i.e. Western orbit rather than the Asiatic."[15]

As is well known, Cripps failed in his mission. According to the 'uncharitable' in Britain, the Mission was "a Right Wing fraud, endeavouring to put a Churchill-Amery policy across under cover of Cripps, the innocent victim of our machinations" as was reported by Amery to Linlithgow even before Cripps reached India.[16]

Amery himself had little hope of the Mission succeeding and when just

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[9]Ibid.Vol I. p.141
[10]Ibid.Vol I. p.173
[11]Ibid.Vol I. p.101
[12]Ibid.Vol I. p.22
[13]Ibid.Vol I. p.651
[14]Ibid.Vol I. p.60
[15]Ibid.Vol. II. p.424
[16]Ibid.Vol. I. p.349

before the end Cripps tried to use his own discretion to make it some sort of a success by saying that "under the new arrangement" the Viceroy's "Executive Council will approximate to a cabinet",[17] he was immediately pulled up by Churchill.[18] Referring to Cripps' view that in respect to honoring decisions of the Executive council "the Viceroy would doubtless do all he could by means of appropriate conventions"[19], the British War Cabinet decided that "there can be no question of any convention limiting in any way the Viceroy's powers under the existing constitution," and "no departure from this can be contemplated during the war. If Congress leaders have gathered an impression that such a new convention is now possible, this impression should be definitely removed."[20] Small wonder the Mission failed and Cripps wrote "I am sorry that my colleagues appear to distrust me," and that "unless I am trusted, I cannot carry on with the task."[21]

But as foreseen by Amery himself, the Mission was foredoomed before it began its labors. Its long-term objective comes out clearly from the following letter by R. A. Butler, then President of the Board of Education. Butler wrote to Amery:

> "The plan would then be that, in respect of our local military dispositions and the safeguarding of minorities, Great Britain would make treaties with Pakistan, with Hindu India and *mutati-s mutandi*-s, with the confederations of Indian states, which will probably emerge. When we wish to reach understanding with an all-India body, the central representative Union will be there.
>
> "The benefits of such a plan would be that the status of the parts would be assured, and the unity of the whole retained.
>
> "It may be said this would constitute too blunt an expression of the view that the British influence must and shall remain, in some capacity in India. I think this is preferable to the course outlined in the paper, which burkes this fundamental issue. We cannot attain in one coup in India what Campbell-Bannerman achieved in South Africa, and I think it will be positively misleading if we don't say from the beginning what I am told is implicit in

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[17] Ibid. Vol. I. p.519
[18] Ibid. Vol. I. p.533
[19] Ibid. Vol. I. p.571
[20] Ibid. Vol. I. p.581
[21] Ibid. Vol. I. p.577

the Draft Declaration, namely, that Great Britain has still some role to play in India."[22]

Regarding the short-term arrangement, the British insistence on retaining "full responsibility for Indian defence" really implied overall British control over every part of government. For as Amery wrote to Attlee on March 27, 1942, "We did in our discussion clearly understand that 'defence' in effect covered 'good government'."[23]

While there were major differences between the various sections of the British Government with regard to detailed steps in India for all of them the main challenger to them in India was Mahatma Gandhi.

If only Gandhi could disappear from the political scene, everything would run smoothly. While opinions differed about the influence of other individual Indian leaders and how they could individually be handled and neutralised or brought to co-operate with the British, Gandhi had to be reckoned with at every step. China's and, to a lesser extent, the USA's support for Indian freedom and their interest in what Gandhi said and did, made the British task more difficult. It made Churchill even ask Roosevelt that "I earnestly hope, therefore, Mr. President, that you will do your best to dissuade Chiang Kai-Shek from his completely misinformed activities, and will lend no countenance to putting pressure upon His Majesty's Government."[24]

Quit India Movement

Notwithstanding pressure from their allies, the British went ahead with preparations against the Indian National Congress. At its meeting on August 6, 1942, the War Cabinet presided over by Attlee, after long deliberations decided that immediately following the passing of the Quit India Resolution by the A.I.C.C.,:

(i) Gandhi and the other Congress leaders should be arrested,

(ii) Gandhi "should be removed forthwith by sea to some place outside India" (possibly Sudan);

(iii) "To avoid giving the impression that Gandhi was being selected for special treatment, some dozen or half a dozen of the other leaders who

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[22]Ibid.Vol. I. p.255, paragraphs 7,8,9
[23]Ibid.Vol. I. p.403
[24]Ibid.Vol. II. p.392

were to be detained should be taken to East Africa by air";

(iv) That the course of action proposed should be communicated to the President of the USA in advance as also to the Dominion Prime Ministers; and

(v) The "British Ambassador in China should also be informed of the plan, but should be instructed not to disclose it to General Chiang Kai-Shek until after Gandhi and the other Congress leaders had been detained."[25]

Earlier, on July 24, Amery wrote to Linlithgow that he was glad that the matter had "come round to my view" of deporting Congress leaders to "Uganda". Amery added, "There is not only the dramatic aspect of the act itself, but the fact that they are completely out of reach has something of the same effect as decease. People forget all about them."[26]

Ignoring Chinese and other pressures, the British began their planned action against Mahatma Gandhi and the Congress on the morning of August 9, a few hours after the A.I.C.C. had adopted the Quit India Resolution. As mentioned above, the events which followed were described by the Viceroy as "by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857."[27]

Chiang Kai-Shek took strong exception to the British action and told the British Ambassador that the only way out left was "mediation by America."[28] This and other suggestions infuriated the British and Churchill wrote to Roosevelt, "I take it amiss Chiang should seek to make difficulties between us."[29] Chiang's messages, "I am deeply concerned over your arrest. Please take good care of yourself for your country's sake," to Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Azad and Pandit Nehru were stopped from being conveyed.[30] Churchill warned Chiang that "the best rule for Allies to follow is not to interfere in each other's internal affairs". Churchill drew pointed attention to the British having "abstained even from the slightest comment when Communist-Kuomintang differences were most acute", and referring to Chiang's suggestion of American mediation stated "that no British Government of which I am the head, or a member, will ever be prepared

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[25]Ibid.Vol. I. p.435
[26]Ibid.Vol. II. p.323
[27]Ibid.Vol. II. p.662
[28]Ibid.Vol. II. p.519
[29]Ibid.Vol. II. p.532
[30]Ibid.Vol. II. p.540

to accept such mediation on a matter affecting the sovereign rights of His Majesty the King-Emperor."[31]

Chiang's concern was shared by others also. Within a day or two of the arrests, the United Automobile workers of the USA at their annual convention in a resolution affirmed that the "claim of the Indian people to their independence is a just and democratic one, fully in accord with the liberating and democratic aim of this war" and urged the British "to come to a mutual satisfactory agreement with the Indian Congress."[32] This made the British Ambassador in Washington inform London that, "I agree with Tawney," (noted British economic historian who was then Advisor, British Embassy, Washington) "in thinking it highly important that British Labour should let its views on the present Indian crisis be known clearly and at once."[33]

Immediately after, as Attlee told Churchill, the Labour Party and the British Trade Union Congress in a statement condemned the Congress' "attempt to organise a civil disobedience movement" and added:

> "The labour movement therefore considers that the action of the Government of India in detaining leaders of Congress was a timely and unavoidable precaution."[34]

Many more similar steps were taken by Linlithgow and his Government to counteract mounting condemnation of the British action. Regarding Linlithgow's reply to Chiang, Amery telegraphed him:

> "Whole-heartedly approve your firm handling of Chiang Kai-Shek's impertinent interference."[35]

South Africa's General Smuts' innocuous suggestion that "the Government" should "call a fresh conference of leaders of all sections in order to come to an agreement on the future government of India" made Linlithgow note:

> "Smuts probably fails to realise how largely the intractability of the Indian position and the naughtiness of Congress spring from our military failures and widespread doubts about our beating the

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[31]Ibid.Vol. II. p.633
[32]Ibid.Vol. II. p.506
[33]Ibid.Vol. II. p.506
[34]Ibid.Vol. II. p.530
[35]Ibid.Vol. II. p.570

Japs. This won't come right till we win."[36]

International Pressures

The period April 1942 to June 1943 was really of continuous Chinese and other international pressure on the British to meet Indian demands. Several hundred documents in these three volumes are devoted to the handling of this pressure. Besides China, Canada, Afghanistan, the USA, even Australia, New Zealand and South Africa felt the need of a new British initiative.

Further, scores of rich and influential Americans wanted to travel around India at this time. All this made Linlithgow, who was the visible dispenser of British policy, at times cry in anguish. On August 31, 1943, he wrote to Churchill:

> "I am now threatened by visitations from Wendell Wilkie and Sherwood Eddy. The latter threatens to come to India in the hope of helping by way of mediation."[37]

He felt that the pressures resulting from such visits were "bound to be deeply damaging to his Government. Moreover, such visitors do untold harm by airing their uninformed opinions in interviews and private conversations" and urged Churchill to "ginger up Edward Halifax to arrest at least for a time this flow of well-meaning, sentimentalists from the USA to India, so that we may mind here, what is still, I suppose, our own business". Poor Linlithgow, Amery wrote in reply "I can well sympathise with your appeal" and in case Wilkie and Eddy could not be stopped from coming, mentioned, "Wilkieis very well disposed and, Winston adds, especially amenable to the influence of good champagne. Eddy is the kind of person who might be greatly influenced by a talk with Ambedkar about the position of the untouchables."[38]

Churchill who, however, did not wish to annoy the Americans unduly tried to pacify the Viceroy by the following:

> "We can, of course, deprecate at Washington in such a manner as probably to prevent the visit to India of Mr. Wendell Wilkie and Mr. Sherwood Eddy. On the other hand, it is for consideration whether you could not captivate them and convert them if that is

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[36]Ibid.Vol. II. p.673
[37]Ibid.Vol. II. p.662
[38]Ibid.Vol. II. p.673

necessary. I had a great success here with Wendell Wilkie, with whom I took the greatest trouble. He is a good dining companion and very ready to see things through our eyes. He has been a good friend to this country and to the Alliance.

"I do not know Sherwood Eddy, but he is reported friendly. I always make a point of seeing these prominent Americans and making sure that they get a good show, and the results have always been most satisfactory. Pray let me know how you feel about this.

"On no account however should any foreign visitor be given access to any of the internees."[39]

Linlithgow, inspite of all pressures including the "strain on Hindu personnel of the ICS & Co. imposed by Gandhi's fast, the repression of Congress & Co."[40] and the refusal of certain army personnel "to undertake duties which involved taking an active part against Congress",[41] stood firm in his resolve of no negotiation. Advice of men like Richard Law (later considered as one of the successors to Linlithgow) to somehow conciliate American opinion, or of Mackenzie King offering to help kept him unmoved.

Gandhiji's Fast

The documents have their ridiculous side too. One such is provided by Churchill's insistent enquiry during Gandhiji's fast:

"I have heard that Gandhi usually has glucose in his water when doing his various antics. Would it be possible to verify this. [42]

The Viceroy replied:

"This may be the case but those who have been in attendance on him doubt it, and the present Surgeon-General, Bombay (a European) says that on a previous fast he was particularly careful to guard against possibility of glucose being used. I am told that his present medical attendants tried to persuade him to take glucose yesterday and again today, and that he refused absolutely. [43]

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[39]Ibid.Vol. II. p.700
[40]Ibid.Vol. III. p.681
[41]Ibid.Vol. II. p.672
[42]Ibid.Vol. III. p.463
[43]Ibid.Vol. III. p.470

Ten days later (February 25) Churchill again wired:

> "Cannot help feeling very suspicious of bonafides of Gandhi's fast... Would be most valuable any fraud could be exposed. Surely with all these Congress Hindu doctors round him it is quite easy to slip glucose or other nourishment into his food.[44]

This time the Viceroy obliged and wired next day:

> "There would be no difficulty in his entourage administering glucose or any other food without the knowledge of the Government doctors," and added "I am suggesting slyly to certain American correspondents here that it has not been so much a matter of having their heart-strings plucked as of their legs being pulled.[45]

This news, suitably phrased, was broadcast around the world and sent to the Dominions by Attlee, then Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, and the very day of Linlithgow's answer, Churchill wired Smuts:

> "I do not think Gandhi has the slightest intention of dying, and I imagine he has been eating better meals than I have for last week. It looks now highly probable that he will see his fast out. What fools we should have been to flinch before all this bluff and sob-stuff. Opinion here has been very steady, and the Viceroy has been very good. Before the fast began we were assured the crisis would be reached on the fourth day. Then at the eleventh day we were all told that if we did not let him out it would be too late and he would never recover. It is now the sixteenth day. As soon as he understood there would be no weakness here he made his arrangements accordingly. You will excuse me, I am sure, if I do not express plainly on paper all my thoughts upon this topic."[46]

On February 28, Churchill seemed almost relieved when he told Linlithgow, "It now seems almost certain that the old rascal will emerge all the better from his so-called fast."[47]

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[44]Ibid.Vol. III. p.538
[45]Ibid.Vol. III. p.546
[46]Ibid.Vol. III. p.547
[47]Ibid.Vol. III. p.553

Choosing A New Viceroy

Another series of documents (mostly in Vol. III) deal with the question of Linlithgow's successor. Except for Churchill practically everyone including Attlee and Amery at one time or another (during October 1942 to June 1943) appeared to have been considered for the job. Even Halifax, one of the parties to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1930. Asking Eden to consider accepting the job, Amery wrote:

> "The next five years in India are going to be critical, not only for India, but for the whole Empire and indeed for the world. If, during those years, Indians without agreeing among themselves, also continue increasingly hostile to the existing system and to the British connexion in any stage or form, India may well become ungovernable and in one way or another, probably by weak concession on our part to the most troublesome elements, break away for good and all.
>
> "The loss of India will, of itself, disastrously weaken our whole position in the Middle East and in all the British countries round the Indian Ocean. More than that, an India seceding under those conditions will inevitably break up in civil war and offer an irresistible invitation to foreign intrigue and eventually invasion. Asia will anyhow be the danger zone of the future, and I can think of nothing more likely to bring about a third world war than an Indian Empire in dissolution.
>
> "All this is possible. It is not inevitable, I believe that with the right combination of firmness against the really irreconcilable, with sympathy and trust in those who have a saner outlook, India can be steered on to a more hopeful course. If once Indians are persuaded that we mean what we say about their future status and can be induced to sit down together and try and work out a constitution under which they can not only live together but face the outside world, the battle will be more than half won. Once they get down to the need for working with each other they will also realize the practical advantage of retaining the British connexion at any rate for the time being. Once on that course the advantages of remaining on it will become increasingly obvious and the psychological motives for secession become increasingly weaker. India, though still needing support from the rest of the Commonwealth against major dangers, will equally be in a position to make her

contribution to meet them. The stronger she grows the more effective will she be as a bulwark of peace for ourselves and for the world.

"In all this the individual influence may well be decisive. A Viceroy who can win the confidence and affection as well as the respect of his Indian Councillors, who can extend Indianization without losing personal control, who can make India feel that there is a genuine intention and practical preparation for future self-government, and who can interest them in the idea that there is an intellectual and moral problem to be solved by themselves, and, at the same time, maintain the unquestioned authority of Government, might in much less than five years transform the whole situation."[48]

Making a last effort to send Eden, Amery told Churchill that Eden's going "might well change the Indian atmosphere and make possible the only solution which does not mean chaos in India and the danger of a new world war, that is to say a stable Indian system of government within the Commonwealth."[49] But though Eden at one time was very receptive to the idea, Churchill, and even more the King (George VI) expressed "grave misgivings on the ground that Winston could not spare so essential a lieutenant at this moment."[50]

Amery further wrote to Linlithgow, "I know also that the king feels, and has been told so by Winston, that Eden is the natural successor if anything happens to Winston himself." The situation perhaps also held little promise just then of any change in Indian affairs. So, in the fitness of things, the choice fell on Wavell.

Two Trends

As may be seen from the brief glimpse provided above, the documents published in these three volumes of *India: The Transfer of power* are by any standards pregnant with high drama and read as well, perhaps better, than any current popular political novel. The torrent of advice which poor Linlithgow is given not only concerns itself with how to soften a Wendell Wilkie or provide the right avenue of enquiry to a Sherwood Eddy or how

[48]Ibid. Vol. III. p.695
[49]Ibid. Vol. III. p.763
[50]Ibid. Vol. III. p.689

best to utilize the journalistic talents of Beverley Nichols but also as to consider the utilization of Jayaprakash Narayan in "making the fullest use of all the bad characters" in the Sundarbans region "on our side rather than letting them be recruited by the Japs."[51] Incidentally, Linlithgow however did not think much of the idea and felt that "it is hardly conceivable that if he were released, he would agree to assist in the training of guerrillas even if he were capable of doing so."[52]

The suggestion itself originated with the argument advanced by Edward Thompson (the historian) and shared by Amery that "when we are really up against it, we may have to revise a good deal our notions of who is a scoundrel to be suppressed or a scoundrel to be utilized or even made much of."

But the greater value of the documents particularly for Indians lies in the glimpse they provide into the working of the British mind with regard to the shaping of India's future.

There are two main strands of thought which are reflected in these documents about the British view of the nature of their rule in India, and consequently the differing channels in which the British-Indian relationship could be directed in the future.

The first of these views was that of the Viceroy Linlithgow and it seems that it was shared by most of those who worked under him as well as by Churchill. According to Linlithgow, "India and Burma have no natural association with the Empire, from which they are alien by race, history and religion, and for which as such neither of them have any natural affection and both are in the Empire because they are conquered countries which had been brought there by force, kept there by our controls, and which hitherto it has suited to remain under our protection. I suspect that the moment they think we may lose the war or take a bad knock, their leaders would be much more concerned to make terms with the victor at our expense than to fight for the ideals to which so much lip service is given."[53]

The contrary view was enunciated by Attlee and was with minor variations shared by a wide spectrum of opinion including Amery and Cripps. In a vehement denunciation of the above observation by Linlithgow, Attlee observed: "This is an astonishing statement to be made by a Viceroy. It

[51]Ibid. Vol. III. p.375
[52]Ibid. Vol. II. p.249
[53]Ibid. Vol. I. p.23

sounds more like an extract from an anti-imperialist propaganda speech. If it were true it would form the greatest possible condemnation of our rule in India and would amply justify the action of every extremist in India." But, according to Attlee it was "not the whole truth." The truth as he saw was:

> "All India was not the fruit of conquest; large parts of it came under our rule to escape from tyranny and anarchy. The history of at least 150 years has forged close links between India and the United Kingdom.
>
> "It is one of the great achievements of our rule in India that, even if they do not entirely carry them out, educated Indians do accept British principles of justice and liberty. We are condemned by Indians not by the measure of Indian ethical conceptions but by our own, which we have taught them to accept."[54]

Such conflicting views about the nature of their rule in India was of course nothing new among the British. Such views had been aired more or less in similar language since the very beginning of British Rule itself. Clive, Munro, Malcolm, Metcalfe and a host of others had the same view of their rule which Linlithgow expressed in 1942. Metcalfe himself commented on the weakness of the British position in India in his note on October 11, 1829.

The other view was equally old and had been voiced for a century and a half by all those who had, like Cornwallis, Wilberforce, James Mill and Macaulay, believed that the British Empire, all things considered, had been a great blessing for mankind and that Britain had saved the people of India "from tyranny and anarchy" and taught them "the principles of justice and liberty".

Stressing Conflict

In conclusion the main significance of these documents seems to be in their providing at least tentative evidence that from 1942 onwards, and perhaps from an earlier date, a concerted British attempt was made to separate the "educated Indian" element of the Indian national movement from its more indigenous backbone. The crucial element of British policy from now onwards was not the emphasizing of the conflicts between the communities but of the conflicts in the independence movement itself.

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[54]Ibid. Vol. I. p.60

The former required no emphasis and after decades of nurturing had acquired a momentum of their own. Having realized the inevitability of some sort of independence for India, the task henceforth was to concede such independence to those who were nearest to the British ideas and outlook. The objective henceforth was that Mahatma Gandhi and those who thought like him had to be removed from positions of influence and authority through whatever means were available. In this the British seemed to have had the full support of the USA whose aim according to Roosevelt, was that they "should try to think of some arrangement by which India found its place in the European and American, i.e. western orbit rather than the Asiatic."[55]

The substantiation or rebuttal of this view has to await the publication of the remaining seven volumes of the *Transfer of Power* documents.

Abbreviations:

1. HSMO: His Majesty's Stationery Office
2. Ibid: ibidem (in Latin) meaning "in the same place", commonly used to refer to the source cited in the preceding note.

[55]Ibid. Vol. II. p.424

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Erosion of Norms and Dignity in Modern India

The Late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Background

[The present note is primarily based on information and data collected by the author from several British archives from 1966 onwards. The data from the National Archives of India, the WBSA, and the TNSA used in this note, however, has been collected during 1980-81]

In these days when the planners claim that there is no dearth of finance for the needs of the rural areas, one would have assumed that men binding themselves to indefinite periods of enforced labour for having borrowed little amounts of money would be a thing of the past. It is, therefore, all the more shocking to learn from the final report of the National Bonded Labour Survey carried out in 10 major states of India during 1978 that not only such a practice exists but that many of those in such bondage continue to be in such a state from generation to generation, and that the estimated number of such bonded laborers in these 10 states alone is over 26 lakhs. It is quite likely that many of the states not covered by this survey have a proportionately similar number of such bonded labour, and that besides, this phenomenon of bondage also exists in large parts of urban centres. It is also fairly commonly known now that a large part of the immigrant agricultural labour from densely populated areas like Bihar or eastern Uttar Pradesh in areas of Haryana and Punjab, and elsewhere suffer an even worse treatment at the hands of those who recruit and employ them.

The question naturally arises how does India happen to have this phenomenon and what is the genesis of the current form of this practice so graphically presented in the report. Further, before any effective remedial measures can be devised it is crucial to comprehend the factors which have provided virtual legitimacy, even a sort of normalcy to such hideous relationship and callous behaviour. The popular version, and perhaps the one

subscribed by unthinking progressive opinion seems to be that such a practice and the callousness which is its current accompaniment have existed in India from time immemorial in the same manner as poverty, ignorance, disease, etc., are assumed to have for ages past been integral parts of Indian life.

However, such an opinion and interpretation, especially if we are serious to devise effective steps to eliminate this phenomenon seems to require a deeper examination, as such popular interpretations are based on mere hearsay and inadequate historical data. The currently discussed theoretical frame and dialectic of Indian rural bondage instead of being derived from the Indian historical background seem more like transplantations of borrowed theory and plans from areas where the practice of serfdom and *corvee* were the ruling system till very recent times.

The present note therefore seeks at some length to comprehend the nature of Indian society some two centuries ago when it may be assumed to have functioned according to its own norms; the status of the individuals, the peasant, the wage earner, etc., in it, and the subversions and transformations which occurred since then. The historical data on which this note is based suggests that the beginnings of bonded labour in its present forms are just about 150-200 years old, that these resulted from a breakdown of Indian society, from the imposition of alien concepts of property and organisation on it, and from the extraction of the maximum possible revenue from the labour of its ordinary people. Further, that during most of this period for various reasons of state policy and requirements most ordinary Indians had become liable to impressment for labour as well as supplies, and the more needy sections being dragged into as indentured labour.

The imposition of alien norms over several generations so moulded the behaviour pattern of the ruling system and those who got allied to it or were its spiritual off-springs, whether in the rural areas or the metropolises is immaterial, that such imposition ultimately led not only to the pauperisation of the predominant majority of the Indian people but also to the phenomenon of general brutalisation and the virtual erosion of their dignity as human beings. Such alien impositions further subverted the norms by which they and their societies had for centuries past governed themselves and treated one another with regard and courtesy. In fact, the phenomenon of bonded labour is merely one of the more glaring consequences of such colossal social breakdown and the calculated degradation of the ordinary Indian.

Any real solution of this and allied phenomena can therefore only arise when this two centuries-old process is wholly reversed, and adequate steps are devised so that a sense of dignity is restored back to the bonded, the poor, and the many more who are supposed to exist merely on sufferance. Such steps would also have to imply that the resources of India are shared in such a manner that all these sections begin to feel that they have a role in the running of their society, and also in the integrity and prosperity of the country.

Undoubtedly, it is not as if all these sections (forming the overwhelming majority of India) have no quarrels amongst themselves, or at times are not callous to one another. But in a vitiated overall situation where this vast majority are mere puppets in the hands of more powerful forces who in various devious ways manoeuvre and direct them, to expect them to make common cause is to demand the impossible. Similarly, idle rhetoric about their piteous condition, etc., though useful in helping focus attention on the subject, by itself can do little. For, in a sense all of us who enjoy any privilege (whatever its form) are essentially little different from the master of the bonded labourer in our own spheres; though sophisticated, our operations and behaviour patterns are not all that different.

A question which may reasonably be raised is that if the condition and status of the peasant and labourer was of ease, well-being, and dignity,[1] some two centuries ago, how is it that such a society so completely succumbed to European dominance (for a description of the life in Varanasi-Bihar region around 1780, see Annexure A, given subsequently). The causes of such an occurrence are rather complex. But such total defeat of a numerous people by a few is no solitary incident in world history. Such occurrences have happened off and again at different periods, and in different lands including Europe itself. England, which from 1750 became the dominant power in India, was itself totally subjugated in the latter part of the eleventh century by a relatively small contingent of the Normans under

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[1]According to Adam Smith (*Wealth of Nations,* 1965 edition, pp. 127, 647, 789) the wages of agricultural labour in India were higher than those of urban artisans; and the revenue paid by the cultivator before India came under British rule was no more than 20 per cent of the gross produce, while the British raised this revenue to over 50 per cent. Even after deliberate attempts to lower Indian wages through direct and indirect means, it was found that around 1800 A.D., the wages of agriculture labour in India in real terms were still appreciably higher than the then current wages of such labour in England (*Edinburgh Review* c.1803). A description of rural life in the Benaras-Bihar area in the 1780s is reproduced from a travel account of the British painter William Hodges at Annexure A.

their leader William (called the Conqueror), and the sort of society and laws the Normans established in England then, and the state of relative resourceless-ness to which the ordinary people of England were reduced to, continued more or less to exist in England for nearly 800 years. Evidently, various factors – political, technological and spiritual – must have combined in India by the 1750s which made it a relatively easy victim. Yet, it may be mentioned that the period 1750-1850 was no easy time for the British conquerors either, and in a sense this 100 years is a period of great unrest in most parts of India. But a satisfactory reply to this question requires quite a different probe and is not necessary for the present purpose of finding the immediate origins of the present day practice of bonded labour and the callousness which goes with it.

I

In contrast to the West, especially to England, Indian society from ancient times had been organised on the basis of communities rather than of individuals. It is not that the individual in India had no separate or private existence. In fact, in the sphere of the spirit the individual has been supreme from time immemorial. However, in the social sphere at least till recent times, and certainly till the advent of European dominance in India, the individual while retaining his basic freedom had socially been an integral part of units larger than himself, or herself, firstly as a member of a family, then the family being a part of a larger kinship group, the kinship group integrated into a caste or sub-caste and these achieving varying local and wider integration amongst themselves. Simultaneously, the family, or the kinship group have been constituents of geographical entities, like the hamlet, the village, the small town, or of sections of great cities like Varanasi, Madurai, Thanjavur, Pataliputra (modern Patna), etc.

Over tens of centuries, like all other areas in the world, India also has had its periods of political chaos, disruptions, etc., and though imperceptibly, substantial modifications have occurred in it structurally, and as regards its cultural concepts, and their manifestations. It is also possible that the India of the *Mahabharata* age, or if the authenticity of the *Mahabharata* age is considered doubtful, the India of the time of Chandragupta Maurya, or of the Gupta-s, or Harsha was substantially a different India than the India of later times. It could be that at a certain period in Indian history, the precepts and the laws of *Manu Samhita*, which deals with multiple aspects of life and socio-political-economic organisation

in most matters approximated to Indian reality in all or parts of India. On the other hand, knowing as one does the history of other lands and cultures, and especially the events and history of the past century, it is quite probable that the elaborate structure, and systems described in classics like the *Manu Samhita* in many matters had little rootedness and were no different than the various more recent theoretical formulations, or descriptions of society which some great and powerful writers or philosophers considered to be ideal and desirable.

However, whatever the modalities of the society of tens of centuries ago might have been, the description of society in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth century India seem to indicate that by this period, it was organised and functioned in an appreciably different manner. It is true that a large section of the Brahmin-s in India had to a surprising extent maintained their *vedic* and *sastric* heritage, and their wisdom, learning, scholarship, simplicity and the pride in it had continued well into the late eighteenth century. Many of them also continued to live, as of old, into separate localities like *agraharam-s, sasan* villages, etc. But then the Brahmins in India had at no historical period numerically formed much more than an infinitesimal proportion of the people of India. In the late nineteenth century they were no more than about 5 per cent of the total population of south India and in fact the number of all those who have traditionally been included amongst the twice-born (*the dvija-s*) amongst the Hindus, has been no more than some 15 per cent of the total Indian population. Similarly, most of the Muslim population of India, except for the direct descendants of Arabs, Turks, Persians, Afghans or Central Asians in spite of their conversion to Islam have naturally had more affinity and a kinship feeling with the respective Hindu castes, etc., of whom they had been an integral part. The same can be said of the more recently converted Christians of India.

II

For the past century, or more, and perhaps from the beginning of British Indological scholarship, it has generally been assumed, naturally on the analogy of pre-1800 European development that except for the Brahmins and the twice-born and those belonging to the Muslim aristocracy, the rest of the Indian population i.e. some 80 to 85 per cent of it was more or less in some state of serfdom, lived at the sufferance of those termed as the "Brahminical" or "feudal" orders, and were immersed in darkness and ignorance. Here, it may be mentioned that for the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth century British orator and writer, darkness and ignorance had wholly different meanings and to the majority of them, these terms conveyed not any ignorance of arts and crafts or technology, or aesthetics but rather the absence of the knowledge of Christianity and its scriptural heritage. According to such usage, it is not only the Hindus who fell into these categories of the morally depraved but also the ancient Greeks – men like Homer, Socrates and Plato – and the Romans before Rome embraced Christianity.[2]

But if India was not immersed in darkness and ignorance and if it was not primarily organised on principles and precepts laid down in the *Manu Samhita* or some other dharma *sastra-s* the question arises as to how it actually did function and what the social and economic roles were of its predominant non-elitist population. That its peasants, its artisans, those engaged in the manufacture of iron and steel, or in the various processes of its flourishing indigenous textile industry, or its surgeons and medical men, even many of its astronomers and astrologers belonged to this predominant section is unquestionable. Further, that in most areas the predominant proportion of those receiving non-Sanskritic education came from this 80 per cent (in the Tamil areas as many as 75 to 80 per cent of the total in educational institutions) is also confirmed by early nineteenth

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[2]For a great oratorial expression of such views see the speeches of William Wilberforce in the house of Commons on June 22, and July 1, 1813, published in *Hansard*. The clause No. 13 of the Charter Bill on which this debate took place was:

> "That it is the opinion of this committee, that it is the duty of this country to promote the interest and happiness of the native inhabitants of the British dominions in India, and that such measures ought to be adopted, as may tend to the introduction among them of useful knowledge, and of religious and moral improvement. That, in the furtherance of the above objects, sufficient facilities shall be afforded by law, to persons desirous of going to, and remaining in India for the purpose of accomplishing those benevolent designs."

Clause No. 12, preceding the above, said:

> "That it is the opinion of this Committee, that it is expedient that the Church establishment in the British territories in the East Indies should be placed under the superintendence of a Bishop and three Archdeacons, and the adequate provision should be made, from the territorial revenues of India, for their maintenance."

The text of part of this long 1813 debate in the British House of Commons and similar writings of Mr. James Mill and Mr. T. B. Macaulay on India have recently been published under the title *Despoliation and Defaming of India: The Early Nineteenth Century British Crusade* by the author.

century data.[3] Further, according to an 1820 survey of the customs of castes in areas of the Bombay Presidency the prevailing view according to British researchers then was that the *sastra-s* themselves recognised the primacy of caste customs and these were to be considered as the final authority.[4] Similar information may emerge about other areas if sufficient investigation in depth were undertaken into the contemporary records pertaining to them. Such an investigation may also disclose that the majority of the Hindu kings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in most parts of India were not from amongst the twice-born but from amongst the groups which were not included in the twice-born categories.

The above is not to say that the *Brahmins* of the seventeenth and eighteenth century did not occupy a higher place in society, or that they did not have a sense of exclusiveness, and that they were not treated with much deference. Further, it is not as if differences of wealth and status did not exist. There were men of considerable wealth especially in the great cities, as there were also a great many people who, while ordinarily well-fed, more or less had few possessions. However, the food and clothing of the great and the ordinary people on ordinary occasions did not seem to have been very dissimilar. According to an early seventeenth century European traveller, a man who was by no means an admirer of India, and in fact was used by W.H. Moreland to prove the poverty of Indian life then, even the emperor (Jahangir) like the peasants, labourers, etc., used to eat foods like *khichri*.[5] According to a late eighteenth century reputed British officer, the only way the great men at Hyderabad could be distinguished from their servants was that the clothes of the former were clean and washed while those of the latter less washed.[6] In fact one constant grievance which the British had against the Hindu rulers was that they lived rather simple lives and most of their revenue went towards the support and maintenance of temples, *chatram-s*, *agraharam-s* , and a whole variety of other institutions shaped and

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[3]For details refer to the author's book *The Beautiful Tree: Indian Indigenous Education in the Eighteenth Century*, Biblia Impex, New Delhi, 1983. (After being out of print for some time, this book has been republished by Other India Press, Goa, and is available in *Dharampal Collected Writings, Vol. III*).

[4]See amongst others Arthur Steele *The Law and Customs of Hindoo Castes within the Dekkun Provinces subject to the Presidency of Bombay chiefly effecting Civil Suits*, Bombay, 1827.

[5]F. Pelsaert *Jehangir's India*, translated end edited by W.H. Moreland, 1925, p.60

[6]National Library of Scotland: MS8326: James Stuart Papers: *A description of Life in Hyderabad*, by Alexander Read, November 1779.

constituted to serve what was considered primary according to generally accepted Indian priorities.

As regards income differentials, according to 1799 British calculations, the total emoluments of the highest officer of Tipoo Sultan, that is the Governor of Chittradurg, were around Rs. 90 per month[7] while the lowest wages in the area at this time were around Rs. 3 to Rs. 4 per month. According to data collected in 1818 in Rajasthan the total personal allowance of the Maharaja of Udaipur at that time was, and had been for the previous 50 years, Rs. 1,000 per month. But to make the Maharaja subservient to British purposes one of the steps which the British took was to increase this allowance to Rs. 1,000 per day.[8] Earlier on, in 1799, Governor General Wellesley had taken a somewhat similar step when he had increased the allowances of Tipoo's sons to five times of what they received from Tipoo himself.[9]

From the time the Europeans began to be politically dominant in India, i.e., from around 1750 in southern India, and from 1757 onwards in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa the society of India began to undergo a sea-change. It is not that such changes were specially contrived by Europe, and in the case of India by the British, for the areas which fell at their feet. In a broader sense what they did in these areas was largely a repetition of what they did in Europe, or Britain itself. The same pattern of hierarchy, the same division of society into high and low orders, the same the orisations - like that of Adam Smith that: "In Great Britain the wages of labour seem, in the present times, to be evidently more than what is precisely necessary to enable the labourer to bring up a family... There are many plain symptoms that the wages of labourer nowhere in this country are regulated by this lowest rate which is consistent with common humanity"[10] – which prevailed in the homelands of the conquerors, were applied to the subjugated areas. The only difference was that the primary purpose of the new conquests and subjugation was the exportation of wealth from the subjugated areas to the conquerors' homelands. If such exportation were possible through the extraction of the maximum surplus value from the labour of the conquered, the conquered were tolerated to exist, multiply and pro-

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[7]BM: Wellesley Papers: Papers of the Mysore Commission, 1799.

[8]IOR: Rajpootana Drafts and Pre-coms 1829-30, Political and Foreign (withdrawn); pp. 78, 141/m.

[9] BM: Wellesley Papers: Papers of the Mysore Commission, 1799.

[10]Adam Smith *The Wealth of Nations*, Modern Library, New York, 1965, p.74

duce the maximum possible. But if such extraction for historical or other reasons was not practicable, the conquered were in time eliminated and their lands colonised by people of European stock, as did happen in the Americas and Australia.[11]

In India as the extraction of the maximum surplus became practicable and could because of climatic factors only be achieved from the toil of the conquered, the deliberate elimination of people was not generally resorted to except here and there. But if people died – as they did in Bengal in 1769 to the extent of one-third of its population[12], and every few years after that in substantial proportions in large parts of India – as a result of fiscal and economic policies, that did not make much difference either.[13]

Some of the primary steps which the new political system initiated were in the sphere of (i) revenue enhancement and centralisation, (ii) attempts at breaking the sense of community (geographical, or based on occupation or kinship) amongst the people of India and reducing them to an atomised individual condition, (iii) reducing their needs and consumption to the minimum especially through higher taxation and lowering of wage rates, and (iv) an imposition of newer concepts of property rights, and laws and to back such imposition to discover or invent suitable precedents in Indian history and scriptures so that the impositions appeared less alien and seemingly derived from the people's own history and past social practice.

III

The enhancement of the rates of assessment, and the centralisation of revenue is in itself a vast subject and requires a work on its own. But briefly, following English ideas and practices, and the needs of conquest as well as of keeping the areas conquered under proper subjugation the first step

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[11]The literature on the elimination of indigenous populations in the Americas (1500-1900), and Australia in indeed vast. A 1966 scholarly estimate puts the population of the Americans in 1500 at 90 millions to 112 million, somewhat larger than the population of the whole of Europe. (*Current Anthropology*, Vol. 7, No.4, October 1966, pp. 395-449, 'Estimating Aboriginal American Population' by Henry F. Dobyns.).

[12]Most histories of Bengal for the latter half of the eighteenth century provide this information. According to Adam Smith (*Wealth of Nations*, p. 493), "some improper regulation, some injudicious restraints imposed (by the British) upon rice trade, contributed, perhaps to turn that dearth into a famine."

[13]Besides the records of British period a great deal of published information is available on the chronology, areas, extent and casualties of these famines in reports of Government, as well as textbooks of history.

which had to be taken in India was to dismantle its own fiscal and revenue systems. These in the main had followed a decentralised pattern whereby most of the revenue was assigned at the level of the revenue-paying sources themselves for a variety of purposes including administrative and economic services, the maintenance of police and local militias, and a more complex and extensive infrastructure which in broad terms can be classified as religious and cultural. Under the British while most of such assignments were cancelled, and the remaining greatly reduced, the rates of assessment over the revenue paying sources according to certain theoretical formulations were raised to double or triple the previous rates. According to the British record, the Indian practice just before they took over was of an assessment which varied from about one-twelfth of the gross produce in certain areas and on certain types of land to a maximum of one-third in certain others. Practically all these rates were abolished and the general norm which the British established was that 50 per cent of the gross produce should be fixed after its being converted into money and made into a regular annual payment, as the proportion due to the state.[14] The European practice of the period whereby the cultivator paid from about one-half to three-quarters of the gross produce to the landlord provided the rationale of this new assessment[15] and Indological research dug out certain centuries-old Indian texts (of the time of Allah-Ud-Din Khilji, etc.) which were meant to give the enhanced rates legitimacy.[16] That the conquest of India and its subjugation were wholly paid out of Indian revenues, and India till the 1850s implied areas stretching from St. Helena to the China seas, was confirmed in a very comprehensive memorandum by as high an authority as John Stuart Mill, in 1858.[17]

In this process of revenue enhancement and centralisation the two main devices used were that of the creation of a system of landlordism, and the other of what was termed as *ryotwari*. Both assumed the state as the chief landlord of the country, and where people had been wholly subjugat-

[14]See for instance House of Commons Papers, 1812, Vol. VII, *The Fifth Report*, p. 16

[15]IOR: Francis Philip Papers, *A Plan for the Government of the Provinces of Bengal*, by Robert Clive, 1772, p.4, footnote. Also *Baramahal Records* (1792-99), Vol. 21, pp. 117-118 in which the earnings of the cultivators in England and Wales are put at about 18 per cent of the gross produce.

[16]The point is discussed in detail in the *Bengal Revenue Records of 1770-1790* , and also referred to in the *Fifth Report*, 1812.

[17]J.S. Mill: *Memorial and Petition from the Court of Directors of the East India Company to British Parliament*, 1858.

ed and appeared to have accepted total subservience, the system of landlordism was established –first in Bengal and Bihar and later in many other areas.[18] Theoretically, the Indian landlord was modelled on his British counterpart, and many of the ancient raja-s after being stripped of their political authority were made into *zamindar-* sor landlords. But the essential difference was that while the British landlord paid only one-tenth of what he received as rent (from the cultivator) as revenue to the state, his Indian counterpart had to pay nine-tenth of what he was expected to collect according to the enhanced rates of assessment, to the British authorities.

No wonder, the collection of such enhanced revenue became well-nigh impossible given a wholly different centuries old tradition, according to old norms. The result was that most of the Bengal, Bihar *zamindar-s* went wholly bankrupt within 10-15 years of the establishment of the system. In the meanwhile, to facilitate the collection of such enhanced assessment the old norms were replaced by new regulations whereby the landlord was empowered not only to remove the cultivator from the land he had cultivated for generations but to distrain all his property including his pots and pans for payment of the revenue. The precedent for such draconian powers, which was in India unheard of till then, was that such a provision existed in England itself whereas mentioned above the landlord had only to pay one-tenth of the rent to the state, and therefore, its enactment in India was all the more justified where the landlord paid nine-tenth of what he was to collect to the state[19] (for the discussion see Annexure B, given subsequently). Regarding the rights of the Indian cultivator, or the peasant, the select committee of the British Parliament in 1812 observed,

> "it was accordingly decided 'that the occupants of land in India could establish no more right, in respect to the soil than tenantry upon an estate in England can establish a right to the land by hereditary residence' and the *mirasi* of a village was therefore defined to be 'a preference of cultivation derived from hereditary residence but subject to the right of Government as the superior lord of the soil, in what way it chooses, for the cultivation of its own lands'."[20]

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[18]A rationale for the establishment of landlordism is provided in the Revenue Despatch to Madras of 11 February, 1801.

[19]IOR: Bengal BRP: P/52/23, pp. 370-81 and P/52/47, pp. 601-18 (An extract from this discussion is given as Annexure B).

[20]House of Commons Papers: 1812, Vol. VII, *Fifth Report.*

IV

As stated in the beginning, the community (geographical, or based on occupation, or kinship) seemed to have been from very ancient times the primary units of organisation in India. The kinship organisation is still so very much with us, despite the vitiation of its forms and norms especially during British rule, that little requires to be said about its existence in the eighteenth century. But as little is known about the geographical, or occupation groups some reference may be made to them here.

The most prominent of all the groups and the most prevalent, and to an extent somewhat better known, was the village community. Its forms seemed to vary not only between widely separated areas but also within particular areas themselves. The two more prominent and compact forms were the *samudayam*villages, [21] especially in the Tamil speaking areas, and what came to be known as the *bhai-cara* villages in the areas of the present Uttar Pradesh.[22] But even where such compact forms did not exist, it appears that in most areas the village community as a whole had the final say not only in matters which concerned the village as a whole but also with regard to any transfers, or alienation of village land or other sources from one party to another. In *samudayam* villages of course and perhaps similarly in the *bhai-cara* villages, the total land and other resources completely vested in the community while simultaneously the individual family had a heredi-

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[21]The early revenue records of the Madras Presidency have much mention, and fairly detailed accounts, of the samudayam arrangements. In Tanjore, according to the Collector as late as 1805 (TNSA: BRP: Vol. 407: Pro.20.5.1802 pp. 3488-90) the number of villages organized as samudayam was 1,774 out of a total of 5,783 villages. A later description of such Tanjore villages is reproduced as Annexure 4 in the author's *The Madras Panchayat System: Vol. II: A General Assessment,* Impex India, Delhi, 1972. Abstracts from two earlier accounts dated 1783 by Alexander Dalrymple, and the other of December 1799 relating to the area of Ramnathpuram are appended to this note, as Annexure "C" and "D". More information on samudayam villages, and the infrastructure of south Indian villages is given in Annexure C and D, subsequently given.

[22]According to the Governor General Lord William Bentinck (1832) the bhai-cara villages of northern India and the samudayam villages of the Madras Presidency seemed to be similarly organised. Paragraph 54 of W. Bentinck's Minute states:

> "The *Bychara* tenure is evidently a species of that alluded to in the 9th paragraph of Sir Thomas Munro's Minute of the 31st December 1824. He observes: 'All the lands of Arcot at one time were held, according to M. Ellis, under the joint or samudayam tenure. This tenure has been much praised by some revenue authorities, and its breaking up into the separate individual plathogum tenure has been recorded as a calamity to the country'."

tary claim on its own share of such resource. Whether every family in the village was represented in the *samudayam* community is not clear from the records of the British period. It is possible that only part of the village was represented in the community dealing with land management, and that the rest were represented in the community only in matters of more general interest; or quite possibly, which however seems improbable, many had no representation in such wider communities at all. It may be worth mentioning here that what is known as the *bees biswa pancayata* (i.e., a council of all sections of the community) has continued to exist at least in parts of Rajasthan, and perhaps elsewhere, till very recently.[23]

In whatever way such communities might have been constituted, the introduction of the new concepts of property and the laws which were enacted to support the implementing of such concepts made the survival of such communities impossible. For a time some of them may have stayed in some vitiated state but ultimately, they gave way to landlordism, to the absolute rights of individuals, and to the alienation of such rights to all and sundry. Henceforth over-stepping the community, money and the practice of buying and selling became the ultimate sanction in all spheres. The result consequently was the accumulation of wealth and land into fewer hands, the conversion of the small peasant and cultivator into a temporary tenant or a state of never-ending indebtedness.[24]

A similar phenomenon began to operate amongst other occupation groups too, especially amongst the skilled craftsmen. From a state of self-employment, through various fiscal and other devices they were reduced to

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[23]Such *pancayata-s* representing all sections of the village community were still functioning even after the introduction of the post 1957 Pancayata Raj system in areas of Rajasthan. To a study team deputed by the Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD) in 1961 to study the Rajasthan post 1957 Pancayata Raj system it appeared that the more crucial primary decisions (including the maintenance of irrigation tanks, or primary decisions like raising money for building pancayata-ghar, etc.) were more often made in these bees-biswa *pancayata-s* rather than the statutory pancayata-s created by the new system.

[24]From 1800 A.D. onwards, if not from a somewhat earlier period, there are extensive Government records in the various Presidencies regarding the auctioning and sale of land, the dispossession of peasants on a vast scale, and the creation of a pauperized landless class. That before the onset of this phenomenon a very large proportion of the rural population enjoyed the rights of *mirasdar-s* (i.e. hereditary proprietors and cultivators of land) is evident from the detailed accounts pertaining to the different areas.

For instance, in the district of Tanjore even after 30-40 years of disruption the number of total mirasdar-s in 1805 was 62,048 of whom 17,149 were Brahmins and 1,457 Musalmans (TNSA: BRP: Vol.407: Pro. 20.5.1805, p. 3488-89).

an employee status, or the status of contractual labour as happened on a vast scale amongst the weavers of India.[25] Through such devices and interference their earning capacities got much reduced and in time all this had a deteriorating impact on their know-how, tools, and technologies. If any group cohesiveness still remained amongst these occupation groups, this continued more at the level of kinship and ritual, than of techniques or craftsmanship.

But such a development in India was again in line with eighteenth and nineteenth century British thought and practice. The idea of any combinations of ordinary people was anathema to the British ruling system at this period. Various statutes got enacted in Britain during this period against combinations, the full force of the state was opposed to them, and whatever combinations or trade or craft unions emerged in Britain during the nineteenth century, such emergence was after great struggle. In fact the British ruling system did not get actually reconciled to their existence even till the end of the nineteenth century.[26]

V

Simultaneously with the weakening and disruption of communities the other phenomenon which got into its stride after 1750 was the deliberate

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In the district of Chingleput (known as the Jaghire from about 1760 onwards to about 1795, and where life and rights were wholly disorganised and disrupted during this period) there were still 8,387 mirasdar-s holding 15,994 shares. In his voluminous report of 6.6.1799 the Collector of Chingleput added:

> "The number 8,300 mirasdar-s appears, however, small... but it must be remembered that the heads and principal branches of families only appear as proprietors, in whose name all the members and other branches are included, which may perhaps amount to ten times that number." (para 347 of L. Place's report on the Jaghire, House of Commons Papers, 1812, Vol.7)

In the Baramahals (1792-99) out of a total estimated population of 6,00,000 the number of pariah engaged in agriculture was 32,474 and those following other trades 36,478 (Baramahal Records, Vol.3, p. vii).

[25]See for instance (TNSA: Public Sundries: Vol. 121: T. Munro to A. Read dated 13.12.1793) regarding the plight of weavers in the Baramahals soon after the British occupation of the area. Also Henry Gouger: *A Personal Narrative of Two Years Imprisonment in Burma 1824-26.* According to W. Bolts, *Considerations on Indian Affairs,* amongst the Bengal weavers "upon their inability to perform such agreements... that instances have been known of their cutting off their thumbs to prevent their being forced to wind silk."

[26]Webb, Sidney & Beatrice: *The History of British Trade Unionism,* 1920, describes in great detail the various steps taken in Britain from 1770s onwards to make any combination of craftsmen, labourers, etc. statutorily illegal.

attempt by British authority to lower ordinary Indian incomes and wages to the lowest level possible. Again such an attempt logically followed similar practices in the Britain of this period.[27]

By one of the early Bengal regulations in 1766, not only the wages and salaries of Indians serving Europeans in Calcutta and other towns were reduced but it was further laid down, "that if any servant refuses service agreeable to such established wages his possessions in land be sequestered and himself and family secluded the settlement" and if he had no possession in land "then on conviction of such refusal (he) do suffer fine, imprisonment, or corporal punishment."[28] Incidentally, it was not only the Indian servants of Europeans who were to be so chastised. Another regulation of 1766 establishing gradation of dignities laid down "that every native who keeps a *palanquin* in Calcutta" must apply for permission and "those who attempt to evade the regulation shall for the first time" forfeit the *palanquin*, and "for the third offence shall be banished from the settlement."[29]

However, it was not only the deliberate individual measures which led to the lowering of wages, the weakening of the people's bargaining power, and their accelerated impoverishment, but also the basic land and revenue policies which laid the foundation for such a happening. Still, countless individual measures to reduce wages of craftsmen, of transporters of persons and commodities, of men engaged in governmental or European domestic service, and of those who had been reduced to a state of complete landlessness, were taken from time to time in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. One of the more glaring examples is of the reduction of the rates of some fifty items, including labour, in the P.W.D. of the Midnapore Division in Bengal in 1847. The reduction made was of up to 60 per cent within one year, and such reductions were not only approved by the Government of Bengal, but the Government directed that information and orders on such reductions and revision should further be conveyed to all other P.W.D establishments. An instance of this reduction was that whereas a certain cubit feet of mud wall construction cost 11 annas in 1844, in

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[27]Ibid. pp. 56. According to the Webbs in 1808 the handloom weavers in Britain were "earning little more than a third of the livelihood they had gained ten years before."

[28]BM: Liverpool Papers: Add MS 38413: Regulations for Native Servants; Proceedings of Committee of Inspection, Bengal 13.5.1766.

[29]Ibid. Proceedings of Committee of Inspection, Bengal, 30.10.1766, in regard to "Establishing Gradation of Dignities... and restricting use of palanquins by natives in Calcutta."

1847 the same was to be constructed for 5 annas and 1 pie.[30]

The general breakdown of earlier norms, the deliberate disruptions of the agrarian system, the lowering of Indian incomes and wages in the process of time, along with many other extensively introduced coercive practices, led to the social and economic degradation of large sections of Indian society. In districts of Bihar (especially areas like Hazaribagh) "a system of serfdom on a large scale" known as *kamia*-s had begun to develop in the later years of the nineteenth century,[31] and similar developments were found to be occurring in various districts of the Madras Presidency. According to a Madras Presidency report the majority of *Khond*-s in the Ganjam area "had been forced to alienate their holdings and to work on lands which once were theirs, as coolies," and no longer as tenants. Similar developments were found to be on the increase in many other districts like Chingleput, South Arcot, Tanjore, Malabar, etc.[32] According to one 1914 account, the *pancama*- s in Chingleput district who seem to have become altogether landless in the previous decade, had been further pauperised as compared to what their condition was around 1880.[33]

VI

However, the step which damaged Indian society most and began to erode the dignity of its communities and individual citizens was the deliberate subversion of its norms, laws, priorities, etc. Largely this development arose from the wish to transplant the prevailing British norms and practices in India, and to a lesser extent by the need to create a situation and an order whereby British overlordship of India became feasible without the constant actual application of military force and martial law.

An instance of the new norms is provided by an address to the Grand Jury in Calcutta by William Jones, the renowned orientalist and a judge of the Calcutta Supreme Court. Referring to the questions "of a master moderately correcting his apprentice or servant," William Jones was of the view that if the punishment were moderate (in the Britain of that time some 30-

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[30]WBSA: Rev Dept: Pro. 19.5.1847

[31]TNSA: Rec. Dept: BRP: GO: No. 1284: 16.5.1916, Misc. Series, Settlement Dept., referring to the letter No. 175. T. dated 29.2.1916 from the Director of land Records, Bihar and Orissa.

[32]Ibid. pp.2

[33]TNSA: Rev. Dept.: G.O. No. 875, 19th April, 1916 "Inquiring into the economic conditions of the *panchamas* and other labouring classes" p.2.

50 lashes would have been considered as a moderate punishment, while 1,500-2,000 lashes, which at times were awarded in certain grave cases in the British army, would have been considered as rigorous and hard), but yet the servant died, the master was not to blame.[34] It is hardly necessary to mention that the number of persons who were given such "moderate" punishment by their European masters was indeed considerable, and that a substantial number of such persons did die because of it. One of the more well-known instances of inflicting such punishment related to the Collector of Chingleput in 1797. He awarded such moderate punishment to no less a person than the head of a village community. The individual, as could be foreseen, died as a result.[35]

But it is not only domestic servants, or uncooperative heads of villages who were awarded such punishments. Things like abortions – which in the present 'enlightened' age are seemingly something to be proud of, and in the India before British rule would have been, if considered at all, treated in some wholly different manner at the level of the kinship group or the family – under the British became a serious criminal offence.[36] Many offences began to fetch punishments of 1,500 lashes;[37] and any protests through age-old Indian practices like *dharna* etc., had special regulations enacted to make them serious criminal acts.[38] Those who had earlier belonged to the indigenous police, or militias and who having been deprived of their revenue assignments rebelled against British authority, as could be expected, were hunted down, classed as dacoits, and according to a newly enacted 1773 Bengal regulation were to be taken to their home village and publicly executed there and their families and relations were by the new law to be sold as slaves of the state.[39]

The enactment of new laws, etc., of course did not stop with only such

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[34]National Library of Wales: MS 5476: Sir W. Jones Charge to the Grand Jury for 1788.

[35]IOR: Madras Board of Revenue Proceedings: Dec. 1796 and January 1797. Writing to the Board the Collector, Mr. Place stated, "I thought it necessary to inflict a slight corporal punishment of two dozen strokes with a rattan upon each of the three headmen."

[36]IOR: Proceedings of the Council of Revenue Murshedabad (printed proceedings), 21.1.1771.

[37]IOR: Orme Collections: MSS XVI, pp. 4663-4, Court Martial at Allahabad 13.6.1766.

[38]Instances of *dharna* abound especially in the Bengal and Bombay Presidency Records. The Bengal Regulations making *dharna* a criminal offence are from around 1795.

[39]IOR: Revenue Dept. Bengal, 3.11.1772, "A plan for the administration of Justice" (15.8.1772). Section XXXV.

enactments. As years passed, they infringed on all aspects – personal, social, religious and political – of Indian life. While the conceptual framework and its procedural frame were wholly moulded on British precedents, their verbiage as far as possible was made to appear as Indian. Translations of such Indian scriptural and legal texts which seemed to provide legitimacy and confirmation to the new enactments and procedures were not only played up but were presented as the authorised customs and laws of India. And as time passed, much of this subversion was accepted by the newly established Indian elite as if all these had governed the life of their society from time immemorial. In Bengal by the 1790s, it was assumed, at least by those in authority or those allied to it, as if Sir William Jones knew the Indian *sastra*-s better than even the learned pundits of Varanasi.[40] Around 1790 a *Brahmin* was charged with murder in the Varanasi area. The *Brahmin sabha* advised the British Resident J. Duncan that the punishment for the accused *Brahmin* could only be that he be marked with a black mark on his forehead and then exiled from the area. Duncan, however, before taking a decision consulted William Jones at Calcutta. Jones informed Jonathan Duncan, the British Resident at Banaras, that the sastra-s did prescribe the putting of a mark on the forehead of a *Brahmin*, who was being charged for murder and therefore exiled, but was to be so marked by hot iron instead of by just a black mark, publicly. It is worth a note that the practice of branding by hot iron had been prevalent in Britain till that time. The person charged in Varanasi may not have actually committed any murder but could have been immolating himself on his or someone else's behalf. But the British had started treating such immolation as murder.

If a deeper study was undertaken into the transformation which occurred at this time it should not be surprising if it were found that the personal and property rights of women at least in most areas and amongst most castes were equal to such rights enjoyed by men;[41] that customs like dowry did not at all touch most of the Hindu castes,[42] and that the custom of *sati* on any large scale, obtained only in a few districts of India and that

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[40]IOR: Sir W. Jones to Jonathan Duncan, British Resident at Benaras. This was narrated somewhat later by Duncan, when he was Governor of Bombay.

[41]National Library of Wales: Papers of W. Jones; also writings and lectures of F.W. Ellis, Collector, Madras.

[42]According to Universal History (c. 1750), *Encyclopaedia Britannica*(c. 1800), and an MSS of 1753 in the Bodleian, Oxford, the giving of dowry was ordinarily not practiced in India in the eighteenth century.

also only amongst certain small social groups.[43] What possibly may also emerge from such a deeper study is that not only alien notions and concepts were forced upon Indian political, social and economic life but that in respect of personal law also, what became respectable, sanctified, authoritative, and legally acceptable was that which more or less conformed to the then British precepts. Indian life henceforth began to be governed by a dead uniformity in all spheres of visible or public existence.

VII

The main motivation for the conquest of other lands by Europe however continued to be the bringing of wealth to Europe. The concentration of wealth and its multiplication had become the principle of the British state system since the Norman conquest of Britain.[44] The European intrusion into the Americas, and then into Africa to capture Africans to provide labour for the conquered lands of the Americas, further accelerated this process. Men like John Locke presented this motive of acquisitiveness afresh in philosophical terms and declared that a person shall "heap up as much of these durable things as he pleases; the exceeding of the bounds of his just property not lying in the largeness of his possession but the perishing of anything uselessly in it."[45]

Such thinking was further spelled out by many thinking Britons with regard to the purpose of their conquest. According to Jas Steurt in 1766 "the more wealth, therefore, they can draw from India, so much the better for Great Britain."[46] Overstepping the controversy as to how such wealth was to be drawn from India whether through the channels of the East India Company or through individuals, or directly by the British State he

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[43]The majority of officially recorded cases of *sati* in the Bengal Presidency were between 378 at the lowest in 1815 to a highest of 839 (in 1818) with an average of about 500-600 annually between 1815 and 1826. In Bengal the largest number of cases were in the Calcutta division, with lesser numbers in the divisions of Benaras, Dacca and Patna respectively. Most of the reported *sati-s* in the Bombay Presidency (maximum of 67 in 1820) were in the district of Southern Konkan. In the Madras Presidency the reported number is yet smaller (80 in 1815, 183 in 1818, 17 in 1820s, and 7 in 1821) and most of these were in the districts of Ganjam, Masulipatnam, Vizagapatnam and Tanjore.

[44]See various histories of Great Britain dealing with Britain from the 11th century onwards. Also *Making of the Four Nations*, pp. 42-43.

[45]John Locke: *Two Treatises of Government* (ed: P. Laslett, Camb, UP, 1967); quoted in Jeremy Rifkin, *Entropy: A New World View*, The Viking Press, N.Y., 1980, p.26.

[46]London, PRO: 30/5/54-II pp. 287-90.

observed, "it would be a great jealousy in that great nation to attend to the names of those who are the first in spending it. No matter through whose fingers the gold first passes provided it belongs to the nation; and an attempt to grasp it at coming home in virtue of a right may be the means of losing it altogether."[47] Prof. Adam Ferguson of the University of Edinburgh put it in even clearer language. Writing in November 1773 to his former student, John Macpherson, Ferguson observed:

> "The company has received some blows within the 12 months and is still upon the anvil to be hammered into nobody knows what. But I hope and believe that no harm will happen. I shall be sorry if anything be done to hinder the company's servants from acquiring fortunes in an innocent way abroad for, after all, that has been said this I believe to be the likelyest (sic) way of bringing wealth from India to Europe. The state I hope will leave the Company in all matters to govern itself, and it will be wise in any minister to leave them accountable for what happens there but it will be allowable likewise to squeeze them to the last farthing they can pay."[48]

It is such over-riding search for wealth, which created the various and varying devices first to acquire it, and then to get most of it into Britain. The more innocent mode of such acquisition was by fixing the salaries and emoluments of the British military and civil personnel in India in such a manner, that the prospect of making quick fortunes not only brought many ambitious British men into India but created an unending stream of applicants for the job of writers (who in due course rose to collectorships and higher up), military cadets and those who were to man various other ancillary professions, including the jobs of chaplains, etc., in the Christian churches. Incidentally in the early nineteenth century, the value of recruitment to a writership (i.e. at the age of about 16-18) was put at around £5,000.[49] This is however not to imply that all those who got appointed as writers paid such amounts to secure such nominations. Many such young

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[47]Ibid.

[48]Edinburgh University: Letters from Prof. Adam Ferguson to Sir John Macpherson (1773-1808), letter dated 3.11.1773.

[49]Such information is available in various published British accounts of the working of the East India Co., especially for the period 1760 to 1860; for instance writings of L. Sutherland, C.H. Philips, etc.

men in fact were related or dependents of men who had the right to get one or two persons of their choice selected for such appointments.

As would be natural, the coming to India to make fortunes did not wait for John Locke's or Adam Ferguson's formulations. The phenomenon had started much before them and one of the more celebrated of such entrants into India was Thomas Pitt, who left India after being Governor of Madras in the early 1700s, the creator of the Pitt family fortune and grandfather and great grandfather of Lord Chatham and the younger William Pitt, the two eighteenth century prime ministers of Great Britain. From then on the stream of such British aspirants grew to full tide. The more notorious Robert Clive, Warren Hastings, etc., merely happened to be handily available when in some fit of British self-righteousness and to whitewash the rest it became necessary at times to treat them as arch criminals.

It is possible that many of the British who came to India did not take to dubious means to make fortunes than what they were entitled to by British regulatory provisions. And this may particularly be true of men like William Jones, T. B. Macaulay, and the like. But the primary motivation of coming to India of even men like W. Jones and Macaulay was to earn in a few years in India, which would provide them with such savings that on their return to Britain they could live comfortably (that is in conformity to their status and position in British society) for the rest of their lives.[50] This is true of such people as most of the Governor Generals and quite possibly of the later Viceroys whose first concern, when they were offered such an appointment, was to work out the amount which they will be able to save during their tenure of office in India. According to Lord Amherst (c. 1820s), while before he accepted the office of Governor General, he was told he will be able to save half of his income, in December 1824, he thought his "savings will amount to three-fifths". He further informed his friend Earl Morley that, "I do not set out with asking myself 'what can I save' but 'what do I require for comfort and splendour'. Under these two heads I have deprived myself nothing... If I stay my full period of five year... I shall probably bring home £3,000 a year with me."[51]

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[50]G. Cannon: *W. Jones*, Vol. II, Jones to Edmund Burke, 17.3.1782, pp. 520-523.

[51]BM: Add MS 48225: Morley Papers, Amherst to first Lord Morley, 11.12.1824, and 26.12.1824, pp. 108-11, pp. 112-113.

Monstuart Elphinstone, who retired as Governor of Bombay, and whose diplomatic and political skills were far higher, however, was more modest in his financial ambition. His ambition was to save Rs. 3,00,000 before he returned to Britain to read "old poets and new publications likewise."[52] His friend Strachey advised him to stay as Governor till he had saved £60,000 which to Elphinstone seemed like "a sentence of punishment for life."[53] But perhaps he did retire with an amount approximately equal to that suggested by Strachey.

To Thomas Munro, equally famous and brilliant and with a longer stretch of stay in India (from 1780 onwards) an appointment like that of the Collector of the newly conquered district of Canara, where according to him there did not seem any possibility of "gaining some credit by augmenting the public revenue" seemed like a punishment,' and he foresaw in this appointment "a certain unavoidable loss of reputation."[54] He, however, finally accepted this appointment, did what he could to raise the revenue to the maximum possible, established what was termed as "tranquillity" in the area and within 15 months was rewarded with the principal collectorship of the ceded districts (areas of present day Rayalseema ceded by the Nizam to the British in 1799). In the latter area, he of course, had full play for his vigour and ingenuity. The devastation brought to the area by an exorbitant land-assessment, and an income tax of 15 per cent on the non-revenue paying population[55] – both originating with Munro – and a total neglect of the existing irrigation sources, is there still to be seen after nearly two centuries of Thomas Munro. Incidentally, it may be mentioned here that at least in the first 20-30 years of the introduction of the British revenue assessments, the collectors etc., of the districts, besides their salaries, also received a certain percentage of the revenue collected from their areas as a commission.[56]

While the salaries of the Governor general, the governors, the members of their councils, the judges of the Supreme Court, etc., were fixed by the British Parliamentary Act of 1773 itself, the salaries of the other civil-

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[52]IOR: Monstuart Elphinstone Papers: Elphinstone to Strachey 23.11.1821.

[53]Ibid: Elphinstone to Strachey 22.12.1822.

[54]M. Martin (ed): *The Dispatches, Minutes and Correspondence of Marquis Wellesley* (5 Vols.), published 1836-7; Vol. 2, pp. 58-9, letter from T. Munro to Wellesley dated 26.6.1799.

[55]TNSA: Board of Rev.: Misc. Vols: No. 34: Letter No. 1791 dated 15.8.1801, paragraph 17.

[56]See Revenue Consultations, and Proceedings of the Boards of Revenue, especially around 1800, of the Madras Presidency, and other areas of India.

ian officers were put on a permanent footing by Lord Cornwallis. The principle which he applied for this was: "that the allowance annexed to the principal and most responsible offices be such as will enable the possessors of them with proper economy to return to Europe with a competency (i.e. sufficient savings to provide them an annual income suitable to their status) in a moderate period of service."[57] For the more junior posts, Cornwallis' principle was that the emoluments should be such that the officers were able to perform their duties without monetary worry, be able to live like 'gentlemen'* and be able to 'advance the interests' of the state by the application of vigour and ingenuity to their jobs.

At the levels of the military whose officers numbered many times the number of those in civil employment the situation was no different, and in fact making a fortune was the major incentive at least at officer levels. As is fairly well-known till about 1860 all appointments at the officer level, from Ensign to a Colonel, in these British establishments could only be obtained through purchase, at varyingly specified payments.[58] Besides the minimum specified payments, there were also other requirements to fulfil, and perhaps in most instances, at least at certain periods, many other much larger payments were involved. Besides what the military, or naval officer received as his salary etc., he was entitled to a specified share of plunder, the proportion depending on his rank,[59] and incomes from various other sources, etc. Many of the officers, of course, from the rank of Lieutenant to Colonel also often got posted to civilian assignments in India as sub-collectors, collectors, etc.

In such a general climate, where the acquisition of money not only had acquired such legitimacy and sanctity, but its acquirement was also expected to be in the overall British interest, no wonder all possible avenues of money making were resorted to. Much, of course, is written of the fabulous

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[57]IOR: HM Vol. 79: Minute of Governor General 1788, "Organisation of Government Departments."

*The term 'gentleman' as used in the early nineteenth century is somewhat technical. According to estimates the number of gentlemen in England then was around 30,000, and each had an average annual income of around £1,500. Many of them were also 'Justice of Peace' and were authorised to deal summary punishments to all and sundry.

[58]House of Common Papers 1857 (2) Vol. 18, pp. 318-19 for official prices of different military postings in the various regiments.

[59]See especially Wellesley Papers (BL: Add Ms) for the table on division of plunder in Mysore in 1799; also British Parliamentary Papers for similar division of plunder at Delhi, Lucknow, etc. during 1857-58.

or large gifts obtained by Robert Clive and his colleagues in the Madras area in the early 1750s as well as in Bengal from 1757 onwards. But soon after the beginning of British dominance such a process had developed into a system and began to have a life of its own. The often-condoned manner of such additional money making was initially through the creation of private monopolies – like that in the production and manufacture of salt, or in the total control of the weavers of an area, or in British military and civil officers engaging in trade and expecting their merchandise to be exempted from the payment of any internal duties, or taxes.

However, the even more important way of making money till the process of conquest was complete, was more complex. After the ruler of any area, like the Nawab of Arcot, had come under British protection, the British authority first compelled him to accept military forces for his own protection, or for the formal extension of his rule to larger areas. For such protection he obviously had to pay. Not having any such money, himself, he was enabled to borrow money from British officers, merchants, members of council, even Governors at rates of interest which in the period 1755-1800 ranged from 36 per cent to 60 per cent per annum. For the repayment of these amounts whole areas were assigned over to those who lent such money, sometimes in their own names but usually in the names of their agents, or some dummies. The same sort of procedure of lending money etc., was again enacted at the level of these areas with the *aumildar-s* etc. The following from a 1795 observation of the Madras Presidency Governor Lord Hobart provides some idea of the working of this system (See Annexure E, given subsequently):

> "The European *soukar* sends his servants and peons into the country, with an order from the *Nabob's* manager to the guards placed therein to afford every assistance (as it is generally called), but in fact to obey them implicitly in collecting the amount of the bonds from the inhabitants. Anxiety to secure so precarious a property naturally leads the *soukar* to adopt such measures as power enable him, and the custom of the country authorises. Then follows this process: if the *ryot* is dilatory in the discharge of his bond, he is confined without victuals, beaten with rods and compelled to pay *batta* (daily allowance) to these very peons and guards who are the means of his confinement and punishment. In this manner, I am credibly informed that an inhabitant who grants his bond for 100 *cukrum-s* is compelled, before he is released from the

> consequences, to pay from 110 to 115 *cukrum*-s according to circumstances. If his credit or his other means are exhausted, which is too often the case, he must necessarily dispose of some part of his stock which consists of cattle and seed grain."[60]

Whether such practices were condemned, or more often condoned, or a blind eye turned to them, it was nevertheless seen that through whatever means it was channelised[61] most of such wealth ultimately reached the British Isles. As decades passed the media through which all such wealth and savings arrived into Britain were further refined and perfected. Referring to the increasing poverty of his area because of the drain of such wealth the collector of Bellary wrote in 1823:

> "The transfer of the capital of the country from the native government and their officers, who liberally expended it in India, to Europeans restricted by law from employing it even temporarily in India, and daily draining it from the land, has likewise tended to this effect (i.e. the increasing impoverishment of areas ruled by Britain)." [62]

VIII

Personal acquisitiveness and greed certainly did play a great part in the extension of such behaviour. But its real sanction arose from the formulations of men like John Locke, Adam Smith etc. and the norms which had begun to prevail in Britain in such spheres. The overriding expectation of British society from its energetic and enterprising sons to make the world subservient to British purposes (as it was expected of Europeans generally with regard to the rest of the world) and to bring as much of the world's wealth as was practicable into Britain further encouraged such acquisitiveness. A combination of all these made it impossible for even men of great strength and ingenuity to return to Britain until they had accumulated a sufficient fortune which alone could enable them to receive the honour and status they looked forward to in their own society. It is not Monstuart Elphinstone, or Macaulay who alone were presented with this problem. Warren Hastings himself was many times advised and persuaded by his

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[60]House of Commons Papers: 1796-7, Vol. 44 (also Vol. 106, pp. 337-40), Minute of Lord Hobart, 24.10.1795. The text of the minute is given at Annexure E.

[61]Various accounts during 1750-1850.

[62]TNSA: BRP: Proceedings 25.8.1823, Collector Bellary to Board of Revenue dated 17.8.1823, paragraph 18.

influential friends in Britain not to return to Britain till he had accumulated a sufficient fortune in India. For, as one of them wrote, life in late eighteenth century Britain without an adequate fortune would not be worth living.[63]

With such supremacy and sanctity granted to wealth and its accumulation, ordinary life in India – of those who had become a conquered and subject people, deprived of all share in political decision making, or even the free management of then: religious, social and cultural life – had inevitably to become depressed and brutalised. It is not that they accepted all this passively. They revolted where they could. Those who could take to various forms of guerrilla warfare took to them.[64] There were huge peasant and urban protests,[65] and a whole variety of devices with which the people of India were long familiar were resorted to, to counter such humiliation, and brutalisation. But the lack of success merely accelerated the process of pauperisation and humiliation and made Indian society further brutalised. Such a state in due time split Indian society as under and all older norms and relationships having got eroded even the subjugated India in time became two nations, the one of the few powerful who gradually made their peace with the alien system, and the other of the predominantly weak and poor who from year to year got reduced to ever increasing indignity, pauperisation, and a loss of confidence in themselves.

In such a deliberately created situation the forcing of people and their means for the purposes of the State, as reported by Admiral Harland as early as 1772,[66] gradually became more and more extensive and in due time such practices began to be treated as integral and 'customary' to Indian life.

IX

With the rapid extension of British rule, and its domination of areas

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[63]BM: Warren Hastings Papers: Add MS 29144, Sykes to Warren Hastings, 25.11.1779, "I hope you are worth a considerable sum more, otherwise, you will be much straightened, when you come here. You know England, it is therefore unnecessary to say anything more on the subject." Similar vies were expressed by other close friends of Warren Hastings.

[64]Various accounts, especially in Bengal and Madras Presidencies; also in Bombay Presidency after 1820.

[65]As illustrative of such protests, see author's *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition: With Some Early 19th Century Documents*, Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 1971; also Revenue Records for Bengal, Madras and Bombay Presidency from about 1780 to about 1850.

[66]IOR: Home Misc. 111: Sir Robert Harland to Earl of Rochford (No. XII) dated 25.9.1772.

which continued to be termed as Indian "Princely States" (from the expanded territories of the Nizam of Hyderabad to the tiniest princely State in Saurashtra), it became necessary for the British not only militarily but more so politically, to keep their armies on a constant hop. For, as was well observed by C.T. Metcalfe, and others too, the British domination in India depended more on impression on the minds of the Indian of its invincibility,[67] and the impression that the armies commanded by the British were vast and everywhere. To maintain such an impression, and also for logistic reasons the constant movement of troops became a must. Therefore, from almost the very beginning battalions, regiments, whole armies were continually seen on the high roads of India. Initially, such movements were more for purposes of actual warfare, of extending the conquered territory, but after about 1803, the movements were mainly to make the British presence felt.

As time passed the number of British military establishments increased manifold and by about 1850, it had grown to the vast number of about 3,00,000 of whom about one-fourth normally were Europeans. Also, as time passed, the baggage of these armies, per man or per officer, also grew, and so did the followers (men who though not actually enrolled in the army, yet were necessary to attend to its multiple requirements and more so of the army's personnel), and furthermore similar increases occurred in the number of families of such enlisted officers and men who were allowed to keep their families with them.

All such movement however required transport and as the amount of baggage and the number of followers and families multiplied the requirement increased on an ever vaster scale. In south India, such requirements were of around 300-400 carts for a regiment of 1,000 officers and men, and additionally of coolies, horses, mules, etc.[68] Besides, the regiments had to have supplies provided to them during the march which normally covered a distance of 500-700 miles.

The oppression such movements would have given rise to and the devastation they must have created can well be imagined. But the British records on these movements are so extensive and overwhelming that it is even unnecessary to exercise one's imaginative and reflective faculties to

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[67]London: PRO: Ellenborough Papers: PRO/30/9/4/Part II/2, Minute dated Oct. 11, 1829, by C.T. Metcalfe.

[68]TNSA: Mil Cons: Cons: 9.12.1845, pp. 16774-6.

grasp the horror through which the ordinary people of India passed through for well over a century. This practice even became irksome to the plans the British had for the European colonisation of certain parts of India. In its report of 1859, the House of Commons Select Committee observed:

> "A system of 'forced labour', under the coercive power of the Government, prevails in parts of India. *Ryots* may be withdrawn by the agents of Government from the service of companies or of individuals. The arbitrary exercise of this power may be a cause of much annoyance to settlers. Instances of its exercise are mentioned in the evidence. It is injurious both on general grounds and because it gives an opportunity for the tyranny of intermediate power; so often exercised in India without the real knowledge, though under the apparent authority, of the Government."[69]

Just four years earlier, in 1855, writing to the newly appointed Governor General, Lord Canning, Lord Ellenborough a former Governor General, and several times President of the (British Government appointed) Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India, recollected what he had himself seen some 15 years earlier how the people of the Simlah Hills region were forced to labour for the purposes of Government. He then wrote:

> "I had occasion to see what vast number of men are occasionally impressed when I called upon the Commander-in-Chief at Simlah the day before he set off for the plains. The roads were lined by men for a great distance – all waiting listlessly for their burthens. And I was told that not less than 3,000 had been ordered to carry his baggage and that of his staff and the papers & c. belonging to headquarters."[70]

Accompanying Ellenborough's letter was a memorandum from Lt. Col. Kennedy, a former Political Agent in the Simlah Hills region. The memorandum had drawn Ellenborough's attention to the extensive practice which the British had introduced of exacting compulsory forced labour after their occupation of the area around 1816. It mentioned that a net-

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[69]House of Commons Papers: 1859- Session II: Vols. 5, Report of Select Committee... on European colonisation and settlement in India, p. 275.

[70]Leeds Public Library: Canning Papers: Misc. Correspondence: Earl Ellenboro to Lord Canning, 12th Oct. 1855, enclosing "Memo relative to the exactions of labour from the hillmen near Simlah & c." by Lt. Col. Kennedy, late Political Agent at Simlah, dated Cheltenham, 9.10.1855.

work of 300-400 miles of mountain roads, four yards in breadth were constructed through such stipulated forced labour in the region during 1818-32. But finding these roads insufficient a further 150 miles of roads passing through Simlah were planned to be constructed in a similar manner. Lt. Col. Kennedy described the construction of this new network in the following words:

> "Of the arrangements for the construction of this new and most laborious work, with the chieftains and their people, I am not in possession, but this I full well know from my old friends in that quarter, that the execution, and I may add exaction, ... and call for labour from the inhabitants, has created a disgust, not to be described throughout the length and breadth of the land. The chieftains and their subjects alike are most hostile to it. The latter are required to work at all seasons of the year, numbers falling a sacrifice to fevers contracted in the rainy season."[71]

The former Political Agent went into more graphic details of how the practice of exacting forced labour (and supplies) had operated during his own over-lordship of the region when "the calling out of the inhabitants of the country on all occasions of men of authority visiting the hills with their thousands of followers to carry luggage, and to keep them supplied with every species of food, during their residence in the mountains" was a never-ending phenomenon. According to him, "this system was of course, followed by other visitors, who made no scruples in sending their servants into the village, to force the inhabitants, men and women, to carry loads",[72] and evidently to do all that was expected of them.

This system had become so renowned that while defending a similar practice in Kumaon and Garhwal, T. H. Batten, the Commissioner thought the abolition of it would not only be an absurdity for several other reasons but would involve an inconsistency especially in relation to "that pursued under the highest authority at Simlah, to which I need only allude as a matter of notoriety."[73] Further, the formation and repair of roads in the Simlah region was considered by the NWP Government as an example worth emulation in Kumaon and Garhwal.[74]

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[71]Ibid.
[72]Ibid.
[73]UPSA: BRP: Commissioner Kumaon to Sadar Board of Revenue, 30.9.1851, paragraph 9.
[74]UPSA: BRP: Pro 18.10.1850, NWP Government to Suddar Board of Revenue, 8.10.1850.

From the above it may appear as if this phenomena of state-exacted forced labour and supplies was limited to specific areas with sparse population, mountainous terrain, or to areas with a climate more suited to European residence. However, the truth is otherwise and from about 1770 to around 1920, and on an unimaginably vaster scale between 1800-1900 this phenomenon, or what in Europe was known as *corvee*, and along with it the exacting of supplies was something intrinsically woven into the system of the British governance in India. In 1887, in a note on this practice for the secretary of state in London the secretary of the Home Department of the Government of India quoted in justification of the practice *privation incommodum publico bono pensatur,*[75] (that is "the inconvenience of the individual is considered to be for the good of the public"). Or, in other words the requirements of the State system justified the exaction of forced labour, and forced supplies, as it justified much else which the State did.

The nature of this State-exacted forced labour is best explained in October 1882 by the then Viceroy, Lord Ripon. In fact in an indirect manner, it also seems to provide part of the logic of the Ripon sponsored Local Self Government Scheme. While discussing the forced labour phenomenon in Assam, Ripon analysed the issue in some detail. It may be useful to quote him here at some length. Ripon had then written: "Impressment is resorted to in three classes of cases:

1) for the making and maintenance of roads;

2) for the supply of coolies to carry the baggages of officials on tour, etc.;

3) in connection with the movement of troops and their supplies.

"With regard to (1), it appears to me that for the more important roads the Public Works Department might, with proper care and good arrangements, provide free labour, while with respect to village roads in which the proprietors are directly interested, it appears from the papers that good *mauzadar-s* (*majdoor-s*) are quite able to get the work done; the establishment of district committees will probably help in this respect.

> "This practice of impressing men to carry the baggage of officials is open to objections in many respect, and the sooner it falls into desuetude (sic) the better. It seems to me to be an important public object to hasten the abolition of this practice, and I should, therefore, be quite willing to assist in attaining that end by supply-

[75]IOR: L/P&J/6/205 Home Secretary's (Government of India) note on "Forced Labour". p. 5.

ing elephant or giving any other assistance of a reasonable kind. If this were done for a few years, the custom would die out altogether, and the special arrangements temporarily adopted might be abandoned.

"But the greatest amount of hardship exists in connection with impressment for military purposes. I am not speaking of such cases as the expedition against the Naga-s, for which special arrangements may be necessary outside ordinary rules, but of the regular movements of troops and the conveyance of their supplies. I cannot but think that some plan might be hit upon in communication with the military authorities at Head Quarters and on the spot by which the carriage required for these purposes might be provided without having recourse to impressment. If it is once clearly understood that the Government considers it an object of public importance to get rid of impressment altogether as soon as possible, I feel pretty sure that means will be found of doing so. The military department and the local military authorities should be consulted on the subject."[76]

But by the time Ripon wrote the above, such analysis, arguments, wishes, regrets etc., had during the previous 100 years become as regular a feature as the execution of forced labour itself. Explaining away the practice in the Punjab in 1887 the secretary of the Punjab Government observed that:

"What does more or less prevail in an unrecognised and illegal fashion in the Punjab prevails more or less all over India. Men and carriages are impressed on emergencies without any legal authority."[77]

One of the earlier descriptions of British executed forced labour dates back to the 1770s and concerns the areas supposed to be under the rule of the Nawab of Arcot. On 25th Sept 1772, Admiral Harland, a royal British official emissary to the Nawab of Arcot, reported to London that:

"The pressing of his people to serve as *coolies* and then bullocks to carry baggage, which ought to be employed for the purpose of cultivation, are what would appear to be some of the Nabob's greatest grievances. This with other practices of Europeans which are

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[76]NAI: Home Judicial, Oct. 1882, Part A, Minute by Lord Ripon, 20.9.1882.
[77]IOR: Dufferin Papers: D.M. Wallace, Private Secretary to Viceroy to W.J. Maitland, Private Secretary to Secretary of State of India, 27.5.1887.

considered as exceedingly oppressive by the inhabitants are sufficiently explained in the papers referred to.[78]

From then on, the practice of exacting forced labour and supplies became the normal practice as British rule, or its supremacy got extended from area to area. By 1819, it had grown to such an extent even in the territory of the Nizam of Hyderabad that the British Resident there had to bring the matter to the notice of the Governor General in Council. In his letter the Resident stated:

"The practice however is of such a nature that if tolerated at all it must be productive of great abuses. The *beegarie-s* pressed at one village are not discharged at the next and even when they are discharged, they are not paid their hire. No discrimination is used in taking them if the number required is not to be had among the lower class; shopkeepers, artificers, cultivators and sometimes even the local officers of the village are seized and compelled to quit their occupations and carry burdens. A few instances will exhibit the real nature and magnitude of the evil more distinctly than any general description.

"A party proceeding to Brigadier General Doveton's force with clothing when they had only just begun their march from Hyderabad and when therefore no deficiency could have occurred among their own cattle stopped the ploughs which were at work in the fields and seized the bullocks from them to carry their baggage. A gentleman lately travelling here from Calcutta found on his arrival at a village within the Nizam's frontier that it had been entirely deserted by its inhabitants and learnt that they had fled to avoid being pressed as coolies. Just afterwards a sepoy arrived with about 40 men who had been overtaken and seized among the fugitives to carry the luggage of an officer who was passing at the time. As a gentleman was travelling the other day from Jaulnah, a villager who had been pressed having carried his load to the end of the stage laid it down by a sepoy of the guard and was running away when the sepoy levelled his piece and shot him. Last year during the monsoon some coolies who had been pressed by a Detachment marching to the northward were detained so long without food or

[78]IOR: Home Misc. 111: Sir Robert Harland to Earl of Rochford (No. XII), Fort St. George, 25.9.1772.

payment, certainly unknown to the officers with the party, that three or four of them actually expired of hunger and fatigue.

"After these examples, it is almost needless to add that the villages on the great roads are most of them abandoned and that independently of the hardship to the inhabitants of the country great inconvenience is experienced by travellers and Detachments of our own as well as great injury by the Nizam's Government. It is difficult indeed to conceive a greater calamity in any country than the permanent operation of a practice like this.

"Three years ago, Brigadier General Doveton at my request issued an order on this subject prescribing the rates of hire to be paid for *coolies*, carts and bullocks when it should be found absolutely necessary to take them for the public service and peremptorily prohibiting all individuals from pressing either *coolies*, or cattle for their private use. The observance of this order owing to Brigadier General Doveton's care and exertions has been steadily enforced with the troops under his personal command. But no attention is paid to it by travellers or Detachments passing through the country. Some officers I know on being ordered to move have sold their cattle with the intention of pressing cattle and *coolies* on the road to carry their baggage, and many of the private sepoys seize *coolies* to carry even their muskets and knapsacks." [79]

The above letter from the British Resident, Hyderabad was also ultimately sent by Bengal to the other presidencies. The Madras Presidency Government, sent it along with a general circular for eliciting information and opinion on the subject to the various District Magistrates. Practically, all the districts had similar stories to tell as described by the Resident at Hyderabad and the descriptions sent by some of them looked even more terrible. The information thus collected was subsequently considered by the Government of the Madras Presidency in April 1821 and at that time reviewing the correspondence on the subject, the Madras Governor, Thomas Munro observed that the practice of forced labour and supplies was "so extensive that we do not hear of one-fiftieth part of the oppression which springs from it."[80]

[79]TNSA: BRP: Pro 4.11.1819, Resident at Hyderabad to Governor General, 25.7.1819.
[80]TNSA: Jud. Consultations: Cons: 6.4.1821, Minute of Governor Sir Thomas Munro, pp. 934.

Munro further added:

> "No body of troops, no detachment or guard ever stirs without some compulsory requisition of provisions, or *coolies*, or cattle, which is too frequently attended with some outrage upon the persons of the village people. A great road, which is in most countries an advantage to the villages near which it passes is in this country the reverse. Such villages generally lose some of their inhabitants who remove from the dread of being pressed themselves or having their labourers pressed as coolies and instances sometimes occur in which the whole *ryots* of the village quit it from this cause, and choose a new site for their habitations, at a greater distance from the road. When the Magistrate is called on to collect supplies at different places where troops encamp on their march, he is obliged to order the *Tahsildar* to send grain and other articles from the village within ten or twelve miles of the camp. As the owners are unwilling to quit their homes the sending them is always a matter of compulsion. They are placed under a guard like criminals to prevent their escape. If the troops do not arrive at the time expected they are kept under restraint till their arrival. The full price is seldom paid, no compensation is made for their detention, or the distance from their house, and of the price that is paid a considerable part usually remains in the hands of the *curnum*-s and the... Revenue servants, or of the private servants who have received the money from their masters in order to adjust the account. If the conveyance of the detachment is deficient, coolies are pressed or the bullocks of the villagers who brought grain to camp, are seized and sent on with the troops, and frequently never returned."[81]

Munro was further of the opinion that, "European travellers are in proportion to their number more oppressive than", even, "bodies of troops". And finally, rather reluctantly, added, that "the system of requisition as far as regards the pressing of coolies is perhaps more extensive under our own than the native governments."[82]

Having expressed such strong opinion, the Government of the Madras Presidency evidently had to devise new steps to correct the situation. New regulations on the subject were therefore enacted and the collectors, mag-

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[81] Ibid. pp. 934-936
[82] Ibid. pp. 936, p. 939

istrates, commandants of regiments were instructed accordingly. However, as may be realized from the foregoing, the need for forced labour and supplies was an integral part of maintaining an alien system and within a few years the same problem began to crop up again not only with respect to labour and supplies for troops and travellers, but also in regard to the building and repair of roads, the repair of irrigation sources and the like. However, from about now on, the word impressment or forced labour began to disappear from the records of government and instead the phrase "customary labour" took its place.

In November 1842, the authorities in London approbated the Government of the Madras Presidency on the report that "the compulsory employment of coolies is in most districts of very rare occurrence and is never had recourse to, but in cases of emergency."[83] This approbation was, in August 1844, ultimately conveyed to all the district collectors on which the collector of Madura having received it wrote the following to the Board of Revenue with reference to the practice in his district.

> "It is (i.e., compulsory labour) confined to the keeping of roads in petty repair, of mud work in this collectorate; and I should imagine the court's remarks had not reference to such like, especially, when I perceive in the new rules proposed for the tank department, forwarded from the Board in their department of Public Works on the 29th ultimo, they entered that village *coolies*, negligent in keeping the tanks from injury, will be liable to some kind of punishment. The Board in the above department are aware how far I look for road assistance from the *ryots*, as the matter is, I believe, under their consideration for report to Government. I shall continue to exact the same till I have instructions to the contrary; and should they be so issued, I hope they will instruct me, at the same time, what means are to be substituted.
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> "This letter should not have been sent, nor did I suppose it would have been necessary, but after the intimation of loss of the Government confidence I never feel the slightest security in any official act I perform."[84]

The reply from the Board to this query is worth quoting here. In its proceedings the Board observed:

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[83]TNSA: BRP: Pro. 5.8.1844
[84]TNSA: BRP: Pro. 2.9.1844

> "The Board observe that the orders of the Hon'ble Court of Directors above noted refer to the oppressive exaction of forced labour for general purposes, and cannot be supposed to interfere with the customary municipal work such as repair of tank bunds, cleaning of channels, mending of roads, etc., on which the well-being of the village community depends. Such labours are sanctioned by ancient usage, and are always cheerfully performed."[85]

How cheerfully such tasks were performed may be judged from the following note the Collector of Ganjam wrote on 18th May, 1860 in reply to a circular communication from the Board of Revenue which impressed on the Collectors "that a return to the former practice of obtaining the means of conveyance by impressment, will, under no circumstance, be permitted" and asked them to reply to several queries on the subject. The collector of Ganjam wrote:

> "With reference to your circular No. 1902 A, dated 19th April last, I have the honour to inform you that as the Trunk Road in this district has for years been left incomplete, there is no travelling by bullock transit; bearers are in general use, but it sometimes happens that they refuse to come, and in such cases they have been told by me, that so long as they exercise the profession of public carriers, they are bound to give their services. I strongly recommend the sets being registered and the extension to bearers of the Rule under which boatmen refusing to ply for fair hire, receive three dozen lashes."[86]

As may be realised from the above this phenomenon of forcing labour and supplies was not limited to particular areas but applied practically to each and every area in India. Its intensity of course diminished as pauperisation grew, and as great surpluses of labour got created because of the various legal, fiscal and economic policies, and thus large number of people could be had, merely under the expectation that they may receive a few *paisa-s* at the end of the day to enable them to some extent to satisfy their hunger. But in the 1840s such a degraded state had not yet been fully reached even in the fairly densely populated areas.

As early as 1842, within twenty-seven years of the introduction of British rule, according to the Commissioner of Kumaon, the people there

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[85]TNSA: BRP: Pro. 26.5.1850, Collector of Ganjam to Board of Revenue, 18.5.1860
[86]TNSA: Proceedings to Madras Board of Revenue: May-June 1860.

were complaining "long and loudly of what they consider to be its [the British rule's] defect and evils in other points – such as the system of forced labour for Government objects."[87] On being asked to provide details, the commissioner supplied the following information regarding the number of men supplied in the Kumaon area during 1841-42 and the first quarter of 1843. He wrote:

"For convenience of reference I think it better to state the totals of the indents complied with for the period named, under their distinct heading which are as follows:

Department	No. of Men Supplied
1. To Executive Engineer, Kumaon	4,828
2. To Military authories, Almora (including grass for sepoy lines)	6,186
3. To Military and Executive Departments at Lohaghar and Pithoragarh	9,261
4. For Government Tea Nurseries at Almora, Bheemtal and Habalbagh	1,900
5. For officers employed in conducting the Government Trigonometrical Survey	347
Total	**22,522**

"The above statement will I apprehend show that my assertion as to the employment of forced labour for government purpose in this province, was not hastily or without full knowledge of the facts of the case recorded.

"Fully admitting as I do the hardship and inconvenience accruing to the people from the system adverted to, I at the same time feel that it could not be abolished, wholly or in part, without entailing some additional expense to the state and on this ground unless special permission authorising me to propose a less objectionable and more costly system be granted, I do not venture to

[87]IOR: NWP: Suddar Board of Revenue Proceedings, Commissioner Kumaon to Suddar Board of Revenue dated 9.8.1842 (No. 494), paragraph 3.

make any further suggestions regarding it.

"I should add that the number of porters employed by the civil officers when making their annual tours in the district, is not included in the accompanying list, although such porters, as being brought to the particular stages by *perwanah*, are equally forced as those who are, also *byperwanah* compelled to bringing grass for the sepoy's lines, or lime for the executive department."[88]

About the same time in August, 1844, in a circular issued to the Magisterial authorities in NWP the Registrar of the Nizamat Adawlat observed that:

"It is believed that commissariat officers on the formation of large camps and the aggregation of large bodies of troops have been in the habit of requiring the intervention of magisterial authority in pressuring the attendance of tradespeople and artificers of various denominations to accompany such camps without remunerations, asserting that they must trust to their chance of private employment, while in the camp, for their recompense; with such requisitions magistrates have ordinarily complied without objection and without reference to the illegality and injustice of such impressment."[89]

The types of artisans and tradesmen who were required to follow these military camps were listed by the NWP Government itself to the Military Board on 15.6.1844. These included:

1. Atta and dal sellers
2. Sweetmeat sellers
3. Punsaree
4. Money changers
5. Noondeewalla shuroff
6. Tobacco sellers
7. Tamolee or paun seller
8. Soojee maker
9. Bakers
10. Bhutteearh
11. Koonjurras
12. Fishermen
13. Basatee
14. Bauzanj
15. Tatarah
16. Butchers
17. Meat sellers
18. Moochies
19. Seekulghurs
20. Cotton cleaners

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[88]IOR: NWP Rev. Proceedings: Commissioner Kumaon to Sudder Board of Revenue, dated 27.5.1843.

[89] IOR: NWP Jud. (Criminal) Proceedings: 13.9.1844, Registrar Nizamut Adawlut to Magisterial Authorities, 24.8.1844.

21. Oil sellers	22. Bhurboojah
23. Buttermen	24. Oomtwallah
25. Khamdoze	26. Paiadoze
27. Iron-smiths	28. Carpenters
29. Gold-smiths	30. Fowl keepers
31. Komers	32. Toddywala
33. Hooka maker	34. Cullyghur[90]

On being told by the Military authorities that "the impressment of men whether for *bazaars* or other purposes is strictly prohibited",[91] the Nizamat Adawlut informed the Magistrates that henceforth the assistance of magisterial authority in such practices was "strictly interdicted."[92] Such instructions, however, created immediate problems and within a few days the Government of NWP wrote the following to the Nizamat Adawlut:

> "I am directed to observe that the rule laid down by the court will suffice for the common occasions on which camps are formed or troops are moved but that on great military emergencies the rule must of course bend to the exigency of the case, and it will then be the duty of all magistrates to forward the military movements to the utmost of their power. This will not prevent their using their influence to secure a proper remuneration for the services of those men who have been procured for the public service through their agency."[93]

Other complications which were created by the orders of the Nizamat Adawlut were brought to light by the officiating Superintendent of Canals west of the Jamuna in his letter to the NWP Government. After describing the difficulties, he faced with the various authorities of the area (the Magistrate at Karnal, the Commissioner at Dehlee, the Asst. Agent to the Governor General at Umbalah, etc.), he stated:

> "There is no doubt that a most stringent order was issued several years ago by Lord William Bentinck when Governor General of India, prohibiting the seizure *of coolies*, but it is of course well known both to Government and to the Military Board, that it has

[90]IOR: Govt. NWP (Jud. Dept.) to Military Board, 15.6.1844.
[91]IOR: Registrar Nizamut Adawlut to Magisterial authorities 24.8.1844.
[92]Ibid.
[93]IOR: Govt. NWP (Jud. Dept.) to Nizamut Adawlut, 13.9.1844 (No. 4046).

occasionally been found not only expedient, but absolutely necessary to act in direct violation of this General order (as in repairing the embankments in the Barhampoor Division and in the marches of Governor General, commander-in-chief and other great personages); and unless the order of Government, and notification of the Sudder Nizamut Adawlut, are in some degree modified, at least in favour of canal officers, so much embarrassment may be apprehended that as far as I am personally concerned, I have little inclination to remain in charge of this office, if my exertions for maintaining the efficiency of the canals are to be thus fettered and rendered nugatory.

"From the accompanying abstract of labourers employed on the canals west of the Jamuna during the last twelve months, it will be seen, that in the year ending 31st August, 1844 there have been 5,18,204 individuals engaged in carrying on these works; and I have no hesitation in stating for the information of Government, that to the best of my belief not a single large party has been collected unless by the sowars, burkandazes, chuprassees, khalassees, malees or beldars of the canal establishment for the purpose of bringing them together; unless in cases where the civil authorities may have rendered the requisite assistance so as to render unnecessary their collection by the Superintendent's people. A similar system is followed to the present day and must be kept up as a matter of course; for if the civil authorities are forbidden to aid in furnishing labourers, the canal people must continue to collect the working parties themselves, as heretofore, at the rate of more than 43,000 persons monthly, unless Government wish the works to be altogether stopped.

"The canal works at Karnaul are already rising in price to an amount that is far beyond our ordinary averages and having lately been fined upwards of Rs. 1,000 by Lord Ellenborough at the instigation of the Military Board, for exceeding the estimate on a single work in Calcutta by about Rs. 600, I had much rather quit this department altogether than remain in it on such terms as it seems to be the intention of Government to impose upon us. During the four years, that I exercised the functions of magistrate on the Calcutta canals, there was never a single case appealed from my court to that of the Commissioner of the Jessore Circuit, who was

my immediate superior; and if in so litigious a place as the 24 Purgunnahs of Calcutta not one legal appeal was made against my awards, it seems manifest that here would be no indiscretion in entrusting me (and I hope every canal officer) with the express authority of Government for collecting any amount of labourers that may be absolutely required for canal purposes, notwithstanding any present regulation to the contrary."[94]

Similar practices of impressment of persons and supplies obtained in the areas under the Presidency of Bombay. While there were regulations against such a practice their existence was more or less unknown, or their prohibitions often ignored. Writing to London in September 1849, the Government of Bombay stated that it had instituted enquiries regarding "the working of the provisions of section XVII of Regulation XII of 1827, against the pressing *of coolies* and *beegaries*." It then reported:

"From the reply of the Sudder Adawlut it appeared, that in the Ahmedabad collectorate, notifications, having for their object the protection of beegaries, had formerly been posted occasionally in different villages on the high roads, none however had been published for the last five years; that in the Kaira collectorate, the rules had been promulgated only once, on the 16th October 1837, that no special orders had been issued in the Broach, Surat, Poona, Nugger (including Nassick), Sholapur, and Khandeish collectorates, enjoining the observance of the Regulation in question; that a proclamation issued in 1836, was the only special measure taken in the Tannah Collectorate to give publicity to the rules; that in Dharwar collectorate two proclamations were made in 1835, prohibiting the pressing of *coolies* and *beegaries*; and that in the Belgaum collectorate, circulars were issued, in February 1846, directing the district authorities to use their exertions in preventing the pressing of beegaries, except for the purpose of acting as guides to *sowars* on duty, who were unacquainted with the roads, and that in November 1837, Mr. Bettington, then assistant magistrate of *Belgum* had issued orders to prevent the pressing of *beegaries* on the much frequented road leading to Vingorla.

"In respect to the number of cases tried under the Regulation

[94]IOR: NWP Jud. Proceedings, dated 9.10.1844, No. 69, Capt. A.H.E. Boileau, officiating Superintendent of Canals West of the Jamuna to Government NWP, dated 26.9.1844.

> in question, the court remarked, that all the magistrates had reported, that there was not a single case on record. The replies of the different magistrates were considered by our late Hon'ble President to be exceedingly unsatisfactory. He was of opinion, that the fact, that not one complaint had occurred during the last five years, was, of itself, sufficient to have exerted astonishment, had not the several answers furnished, explained the cause, and made it doubtful whether the people at large possessed a knowledge of the existence of the Regulation, passed for their protection."[95]

Regarding impressment in the Mahabaleshwar area, the Government of Bombay stated to London:

> "Subsequently it was brought to our notice, that the villages in the neighbourhood of Mahabaleshwar were not unfrequently denuded of their inhabitants at the very moment their presence was required for the purpose, of cultivation, and every stray bullock, within a considerable distance, was forcibly seized to supply carriage to the visitors leaving the hills at the commencement of the rains. The Sudder Adawlut were, therefore, instructed to call upon the magistrate of Tannah to explain, why he did not, when replying to the former reference, bring the above facts to the notice of Government."[96]

Reviewing the position some 40 years later in May 1887, the Home Secretary of the Government of India put the then situation in the Bombay Presidency in the following words:

> "Impressment of labour for the service of the state or the landlord is said to be customary in all native states in the Bombay Presidency, and the right thereto is a subject of judicial suits. In British territory, it is retained in the villages under *talukdars*, and is usually an incident of landlord tenures. When exacted by native chiefs or landlords, it is believed to be customary not to give more than subsistence allowance; and the demand, therefore, partakes of the nature of a tax. The only form in which it exists in British Districts as a statutory demand is when carriage is pressed for movement of troops, or when labour is called out under the

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[95]IOR Board's Collections: No. 122510, Judicial letter from Bombay, 8.9.1849 (No. 30) paragraphs 67-69.
[96]Ibid. paragraph 78.

> Irrigation Act for emergent repairs to canals. Impressment of carriage is also had recourse to in order to provide transport for the tents and baggage, official and private, of officers travelling on duty."[97]

Examples of impressment for personal purposes, by British officers in general and a high military officer in particular were provided by the commissioner, Jubbulpore to the Government of NWP on 8th July 1836. As what he described seems representative of the phenomenon his description may be given at some length here. The commissioner reported:

> "I am sorry to say that in some cases the European civil functionaries were just as bad. Another great abuse was also in vogue; viz, that whatever an English gentleman might require even when residing at his own station sheep, fowls, workmen, building materials etc., were procured by orders to the police and revenue officers of which the consequence of course was that the sum paid for labour or articles, was below the fair price. At Saugor, I found a *Jemadar* and four *Burkundauzes* of the Kotwallee employed almost entirely in procuring whatever any English gentleman might require from the *bazaars* in the town; and almost everywhere I was assured on my intimating a determination to put a stop to such abuses that without the assistance of the police no Englishman would be able to procure anything he might require – a tolerable proof of the shameful extent to which the system had been carried, that natives whose livelihood was derived from selling goods would not willingly dispose of them to an English gentleman for fear of not receiving their full value."[98]

Regarding the particular military officer he added:

> "From the result of the investigation I have reason to believe that during the whole distance from Baitool to at least within two marches of Mirzapore, a distance of about 40 marches, Col. Costley daily caused from 40 to 50 or even more men to be furnished to him to carry loads from stage to stage almost the whole of whom were employed in carrying his private baggage and that in

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[97] IOR: L/P&J/6/205: Home Secretary's Note on Forced Labour (based on Bombay D.O. of 5.5.1887).

[98] IOR: Board's Collections, No. 74862, Commissioner Jubbulpore to Government NWP 8.7.1836.

no one instance were the men paid the full hire which they ought to have received. Many of them did not receive anything whatever. The following has been ascertained as far as the depositions of the people can be relied on and which I see no reason to discredit more especially as other corps were marching along that road about the same time against the officers of which no complaints were made. From Shapoor to Kesula in the Baitool district was made by the 18th Regiment in two marches. From the former place 30 *beegaries* were taken and after carrying their loads were placed under a Guard during the night the halting place being at an uninhabited place where other men were not easily to be procured. On the next day they were again obliged to carry loads and were discharged at Kesula. Some of these received 3 pice, others as much as two *annas*. From Baleye 50 men were taken for a stage of whom some received 3, some 4 pice, others obtained no payment.

"The above are only the number of people whom the revenue officers were able after considerable search to collect and take their evidence. The police and revenue officers when questioned said in excuse that the practice was very common and that they did not dare refuse a requisition of the sort... one of them the Naib Peshcar of Jubulpore however states that on his representing the insufficiency of the remuneration given, Col. Costley tauntingly told him that civil officers might pay the full rate, but the military officers could not afford it. Moreover, it is asserted that earthen pots, grass, firewood, fowls, eggs, milk and curds were regularly taken without any payment being made."[99]

There were reports of similar occurrences from what are termed 'Native States' when British troops or travellers marched through them. In 1843, writing on this aspect, the Government of India reported to London:

"In consequence of frequent complaints stated to have been experienced by *ryots* and villagers of Native States by the practice of pressing them to act as *beegaries* on the march of our troops through these territories, the President caused a notification (of which a translation is noted in the margin) to be issued with a view to the suppression of this grievous evil."[100]

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[99]Ibid.

[100]IOR: Board's Collections, No. 90026, Letter from India, Political Dept. 15 Feb (No. 2) 1843, paragraph 73.

Returning to the more recent period, in 1891 the Commander-in-Chief of the British Indian army "considered that no steps would more greatly add to the *izzat* of military service, or give recruiting a more powerful impetus than that of exempting all soldiers at their homes on furlough, reservists or pensioners from forced labour, and strongly urged that this immunity might be granted them."[101] This view of the Commander-in-Chief was considered from time to time by the Government of India and though not wholly agreed to, some partial relief from forced labour was given to the soldiers, over the next twenty years. But in 1910, the Army Department raised this question of complete exemption yet again especially with reference to the soldiers from Kumaon and Garhwal. The question, raised divided views in the Viceroy's council and the matter was ultimately referred for the opinion of the United Provinces Government (present Uttar Pradesh).

The matter was considered by the Government of UP at considerable length. But ultimately, it felt that it was unable to accede to this request as since about the 1820s (soon after the British became rulers of Kumaon, Garhwal, etc.) it was a condition of every land settlement with the landholders, etc., of the area that "every landholder and cultivator is bound to supply *coolies*and *bardaish* (supplies) according to custom and requisition of authorised officers."[102] The UP Government, therefore, felt unable to agree to any such exemption and its long reply of 19th October 1910 further noted in justification of its view that:

> "Moreover, a class of men far more entitled to exemption from this service than soldiers or reservists is required, in place of giving its own labour, to provide substitutes. There are in the Garhwal district a few villages inhabited solely by pilgrim's priests. These men pay every year a fixed sum as compensation for being excused from the duty of porterage. Seeing that these priests who do not themselves carry loads and occupy a position of consideration and dignity have to pay for substitutes, it cannot be argued that the soldier is disgraced in the eyes of his fellow Garhwali-s, because he is not totally exempted from the obligation attached to the settlement engagement."[103]

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[101] NAI: Public A: Feb: 1911, Minute of Commander-in-Chief 1891.

[102] Ibid. Chief Secretary, Government of UP to Home Dept. Government of India, 19.10.1910, paragraph 2.

[103] Ibid. paragraph 9.

However, by 1910, this phenomenon of forced labour exacted by British state authority through a variety of regulations, rules, stipulations etc., was much on the decline in most parts of India. Prominent amongst the several factors which contributed to this decline, were the creation of abundant surplus labour over the previous century, and in later decades the erection of a network of railways. Yet even in 1910, in places where labour had not become so abundant, and no railways could be erected the practice had continued as it had in Kumaon and Garhwal and was justified by observations like the one quoted above.

X

How and when this practice of forced labour and forced supplies had begun in modern times and grown and multiplied has been discussed at some length in the preceding pages. But like most things, it is possible that forced labour in some form or another had, to some extent, prevailed in various parts of India at different periods of its long history, as it had prevailed in the form of the *corvee* system, or serfdom in Europe from ancient times to as late as the nineteenth century. In seventh century Bavaria, the peasants were expected to do three days of forced labour in every week for the landlord,[104] in eighteenth century Hungary for 52 days in a year,[105] and even as late as 1835 "local roads were subject to repair by statutory labour" in England.[106]

It is possible that in India also, or parts of it, practices like *corvee*, and serfdom had prevailed in ancient or later times, and it may, as sometimes alleged, even be true that many of the great Indian historical monuments like the Taj Mahal were largely the products of forced labour. But if it be so, how far such systems prevailed in India, and what their actual genesis were, require very intensive research into the functioning of Indian society not merely on the basis of some scriptural texts here and there, or on the assumption that what had existed in Europe, or some other areas must also have existed in India, but on the basis of hard data.

Lacking any such hard data for the earlier period what has been attempted above is limited to an understanding and some description of this phenomenon during the period of British rule. Further, it may be

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[104]Encyclopaedia Britannica (1911), Article on *Serfdom*
[105]Encyclopaedia Britannica (1911), Article on *Corvee*
[106]Ibid.

added here that while the prevalence of forced labour etc., in the earlier periods cannot altogether be ruled out, the British record does seem to indicate that when the British began to exact such labour, the contemporary Indian society seemed to be horrified by it.

It is quite possible that in various parts of India, or throughout it, as quite often mentioned by the British record, there was a practice that local communities (villages, small, towns, etc.) did attend to the requirements of pilgrims, and other travellers, etc., and that part of such attendance was offered by such communities as a matter of courtesy and without any charge. But as especially brought out when the phenomenon of British imposed forced labour in Assam was under discussion in 1881, the earlier local communities had budgetary and revenue provisions for providing such facilities.[107] And it was the elimination of such budgetary and revenue provisions, and a much extended and harsher enforcement of forced labour (especially because of never-ending British military needs) that throughout the nineteenth century, the phenomenon of forced labour became a terror and horror to the ordinary people of India. Given such a long stretch of time and the legal and administrative sanctity that later accompanied the phenomenon of state sponsored indentured labour, it is no wonder that even when the statutory or regulatory compulsions were withdrawn, the practices of over a century had so fashioned the minds of the stronger sections of Indian society – and the practice had been made to assume such "customary" sanction – that the phenomenon continues to this day and in places has assumed even uglier forms like the present bonded labour practice, or the general treatment of Adivasis, Harijans, etc.

Another phenomenon to which attention may be drawn here, and to which some reference has already been made was the practice of exorbitant interest rates which began to be charged under British dominion and power, not only from the weak but also from the elite of Indian society, its *Raja*-s, *Nawab*-s, etc. In cases they did not easily surrender to such demands, they were threatened with the plunders of their states, capital cities, etc. To escape such calamities many of them like the *Raja*-s of Tanjore, etc., succumbed to British terror, paid huge sums to save their territories, agreed to maintain British troops, and thus became tributaries of British power.[108]

[107]NAI: Home Jud., Oct. 1882, Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup to Chief Commissioner, Assam dated 13.7.1882; quotes several Indian officials on this point.

[108]There is much published and manuscript material on the subject. For an early (A.D. 1764) account of such happenings see Major Mackenzie's Journal (National Library of Scotland).

At lower levels the same sort of treatment was being meted out to the weavers, other artisans, and the peasantry. The Indian moral sense, of feeling obliged to pay back any sort of debt, however incurred, was in such instances grossly abused. Increasingly in the eighteenth century, the practice grew of the British forcing little bits of money on the various classes of weavers, so that they were not only compelled but also felt morally bound to manufacture the required cloth for the British, even if such manufacture led to an ultimate loss to the weaver.[109] Such occurrences are so well known that not many illustrations are required to establish their existence.

XI

It is such elements which joined together finally disrupted the cohesion of Indian society, eroded the sense of dignity amongst its citizens, destroyed or subverted Indian norms, and ultimately led to general pauperisation. These in their turn accelerated the brutalisation of India and established a built-in clash between the relatively powerful and the weak. Further pauperisation not only led to economic ruin but even more so to cultural impoverishment. The result was that henceforward the balance of Indian society was wholly disturbed. In the words of the pioneer historian of science, the late George Sarton:

> "The Western nations did not simply exploit and enslave their Eastern brothers; they did much worse, they failed to appreciate their spiritual heritage and tried to deprive them of it; it was not enough for them to conquer their material goods, they wanted to conquer their very souls. We are today paying the cost of their greed and of their stupidity."[110]

It is such all-round deprivation over several generations especially in a society of rather low physical vitality that the vitiation which one sees today in practically every sphere of Indian society became inevitable. The consequence has been that the predominant sections of the people became bereft of education, of adequate housing, of sanitation, and even of public festivity and rejoicing. Under such circumstances their skills and innovative capacity naturally declined, and their professions and occupations having lost respect, were degraded in economic terms, and their political influence

[109] Refer to footnote 25.

[110] George Sarton. *The Appreciation of Ancient and Medieval Science during the Renaissance (1450-1600)*, pp. 173-4.

in the body-politic reduced to the minimum. More than the concept of any caste-hierarchy (debatable in itself), or the idea of *varnasrama*, it is these other factors which are primarily responsible for the reduction of our people into what have been termed as the scheduled castes and tribes, or the backward classes and their comparatively degraded state. That today some of these wronged and deprived people attempt to bridge the great gap created in the past 150-200 years through a variety of means, some of which are treated as objectionable was but to be expected. For, except by Gandhiji, no appreciable attempt has been made to at least restore their dignity, provide relevance and respect to their occupations, and treat them as human beings since we politically became a free people.

Phenomena like that of the currently rather much debated bonded labour, though horrible in themselves, are merely uglier symptoms of this greater malaise. That the needy at times borrowed bits of money and tried to pay it back through contractual labour, though humiliating, is in itself a fairly innocuous and in situations of pressing need, a world-wide practice. But that those who happen to be reduced to such a borrowing state have to be treated as hereditary serfs is something which can only exist in a society which has become vitiated and its norms uprooted as those of India have been in the past two centuries.

It is not as if there were no contractual money arrangements some generations ago. But as may be seen from the following contractual labour bonds from the Konkan of the 1840s, there is nothing much exceptionable about them. One of these is as follows:

> "*Chaukuree Khut* (deed of service) dated Shukay 1764, 2 Falgoon Sood.
>
> "The name of the creditor is Alladin Meera Khajia of Mallar, that of the debtor is Fukeer Vulud Shaikh Dausud of Mallax. I (the debtor) have borrowed of you (the creditor) a sum of Surat Rupees 61 for my marriage, and agree to serve you for 15 months, Rs. 4.1 being for one month. I shall complete the period of 15 months by serving you. I shall feed and clothe myself at my own expense. I have received the aforesaid sum in ready cash and execute the deed of service. I shall render you service during day and night. Should I desert your service, then the service I may have rendered shall be deducted and the balance with interest shall be paid to you. Balla Vulud Balla Bhave of the aforesaid place engages to become security for the payment, promising to pay you the sum of Rs. 61 which

> I have borrowed of you on the condition of serving you for 15 months, in the event of my deserting you. In the payment of the above sum with the interest, the service I may have rendered should be deducted. We two pass this deed binding ourselves jointly and severally. We pass this at our own accord." [111]

Another, while slightly different, basically follows the same contractual norm. It reads:

> "*Chaukuree Khut* (deed of service) dated Shukay 1764, Shubhukroot 7th Maghur Sood. The name of the creditor is Runsord Govindjee Patel, inhabitant of Mallar. The name of the debtor is Dhurma bin Madho Naveel, inhabitant of the aforesaid place: I (the debtor) have borrowed of you (the creditor) a sum of Rs. 51 of Surat currency, for my marriage. I hereby agree to serve you for five years, Rs. 10 being for one year. I shall serve you during the day and night, until I complete the above period. You are to feed and clothe me as usual. I appoint as securities for the payment of the rupees, Podhurao bin Keshow Rauval, Muhow bin Hujee Rauval, and Gunoo bin Manow Rauval of the aforesaid place. These three persons bind themselves jointly and severally to the effect that, should Dhurma the aforesaid desert the service, they will perform the services as agreed, and should they fail to perform the service, then the service performed by Dhurma shall be considered as forfeited and the money now borrowed shall be paid with interest. We have received the sum of Rs. 51 in ready cash, and we pass this deed of service, jointly and severally, and at our own accord."[112]

XII

Another practice which was said to have prevailed in India was what was termed 'agrestic slavery'. The term as such is derived from serfdom in Europe. But when new concepts of land rights, ownership, etc., and the unbridled sale and auction of these rights were introduced into India from about the end of the eighteenth century the term agrestic slavery began to be applied to the resulting situation. As mentioned before, the Indian agrarian system had its own norms, and organisational pattern. In it while

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[111] IOR: Board's Collections: No. 95698, pp. 2-15, A.D. 1843, Deed of Service III
[112] Ibid. Deed of Service II.

those who were engaged in the cultivation of land had inalienable hereditary rights, those rights in themselves were not absolute and in matters of any transfers etc., were subject to the wishes of the total community of the cultivators, and perhaps of the whole village community. Therefore, when the new British concepts got introduced, to the people living in any area even when their legal rights had been altered arbitrarily there could not be any question in their minds of quitting the villages, land, etc., which they and their ancestors had inhabited for generations, if not for millennia. But to the British mind, the fact of their continuing on such lands whose ownership had been altered by them, looked like European serfdom, or what they termed as agrestic slavery.[113]

Besides this wholesale classification of a large proportion of the agricultural population as 'agrestic slaves' the British also began to write about the prevalence of non-agrestic slavery, especially in areas like Malabar.[114] It is quite possible that such slavery had existed in parts of India and in a substantial degree from much before British rule. But it is also possible that the practice was not that old and was in the main introduced into the coastal areas of India through the post-1500 European contact itself. As is well known, from about the early sixteenth century the capturing, enslaving and selling of people, especially from Western and Central Africa became the most flourishing and profitmaking European trade.[115] Many such slaves were also brought into India, and if other European originated practices, commodities, etc., could be introduced into India, it should be no surprise that slavery was also amongst one such introductions. This is not, however, to imply that slavery of any type did not exist in India at any time. Some Africans made into slaves by Islamic rulers were being brought into various regions of India from about A.D. 1200 onwards. The argu-

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[113]TNSA: Madras Board of Revenue Proceedings, especially Board's Minute of 5.1.1818, where a large number of people, particularly *pariahs*, engaged in agriculture and allied tasks were termed as agrestic slaves.

[114]TNSA: Madras Board of Revenue; Reports on Malabar around 1820s, also try to establish the above point in great detail.

[115]Europe started capturing Africans from western and central Africa from around 1450 A.D. By 1500 A.D. It became a major trade and between A.D. 1500-1830, over ten million Africans were imported and registered as slaves in the Americas and the Atlantic islands. The number of persons involved in the process of raiding, capturing, transporting by land, and then by sea could have ultimately meant the physical elimination of 100 million Africans. Besides, such persistent and wide scale raiding and capturing etc., would have disrupted whole regions of Africa, and reduced their states and societies to rubble.

ment is merely to suggest that what is termed as 'agrestic slavery' by the British and the prevalence of some type of slavery or bondage reported to be prevalent here and there require a deeper investigation.

Yet, whatever may have been the earlier relationship between the strong and the weak in India before the onset of British rule, whatever the relationship of the individual with the geographical or the kinship community, or the relations between such communities themselves, there can be little doubt that such earlier relationships were wholly vitiated by total political subjugation, and given the atrocious nature of the concepts, and practices initiated by the new state system it was bound to have an immense disruptive and brutalising impact on Indian life. Therefore, while some built-in tensions of the *varna* scheme, or of the caste phenomena, may have also played some small part in the continuing of clashes and conflicts amongst the various groups and classes, the current brutalisation and its seeming acceptance in the India of today are products, not as is generally said of centuries old maltreatment of the "lower orders", as the British put it, but, essentially of what was imposed on India in the past two centuries, and to an extent further accentuated by unthinking post-1947 continuation of the concepts, structures and procedures bestowed on India by the British.

Ultimately, it is imperative to realise that while relief to the needy and those in distress can always be provided by adhoc steps and funding, there are no piecemeal solutions to socially built-in practices like the currently debated problem of bonded labour, and much more of the more extensive and disruptive practice of most of India's population being considered as mere objects of pity, of charity, of development. Nothing really worthwhile can happen in India till the roots of such a situation and the ideas, thinking, and concepts which have given rise to it are comprehended. For, after all, it is not only the powerful in the rural areas who tend to be harsh, oppressive, and unimaginably exploitative in their relations with the weak amongst them. The situation in the urban areas, especially in the metropolises of India is even more deplorable, and the treatment of the weak by the enlightened urban elite is perhaps more inhuman accompanied as it is by indifference and a lack of any real contact. Essentially the problem India faces is of deep-rooted alienation between the educated, enlightened and powerful who command most of the resources of India and are enamoured of alien models in every sphere (even in the matter of the type of their toilets), and the relatively resourceless but hard-working people of India, for

whom 'modern' India continues to be something to be feared and remains a great insolvable puzzle. The rural elite are merely treading, though more crudely the paths laid for them by their more powerful cousins in the urban areas. It is only when this basic question is attended to, that worthwhile and practical solutions can emerge to our pressing problems including that of the estimated 26 lakh bonded labourers in the rural areas.

Abbreviations used:

BM: British Museum
BRP: Board of Revenue Proceedings
IOR: India Office Records
NAI: National Archives of India
PRO: Public Record Office, London
TNSA: Tamil Nadu State Archives
UPSA: Uttar Pradesh State Archives
WBSA: West Bengal State Archives

Annexure-A

A description of Life in the Varanasi-Bihar Region (circa 1780)

[From William Hodges: *Travel in India During the Years 1781-1783* , London, 1793. (as per footnote No. 1 in previous section)][1]

It is not uncommon also, in excursions through these parts of the country, to meet with various *fakir*-s, with a more than savage appearance. Sometime whole families may be seen travelling up and down the country; forming most beautiful picturesque groups; sometimes with camels loaded with goods; some of the party riding on bullocks, the females in *hackeries*, and the younger part of the company on small horses, brought from the mountains bordering the eastern side of Bengal. These horses are called *tanyan*-s and are mostly piebald. The men march on foot, armed with spears and matchlocks; their sabres and shields are slung across their backs. These are certainly valuable subjects for the painter. The lodgings of the traveller in India are the *serai*-s, or caravan *serai*-s (places for the caravans), as they are called in Europe. Many of these are in the great roads, and have been erected either by charitable persons, or at the public expense. The Emperor, whom I have already mentioned for his attention to the public accommodation, built many, from the extremity of Bengal to Lahore. There is a noble building of this kind remaining at Rajemahel, built by Sultan Sujah, when he was Subah of Bengal. The form is a square of equal sides; the entrance from the Bengal road is through a large and highly ornamented gate, which also possesses military strength no less than beauty. Round the four sides is a wall about twenty feet high; attached to the wall round the sides are separate apartments, covered on the top, and open to the centre of the area within. In these places the traveller lodges his goods, and sleeps; the area within the square is for the beasts. Attendant on these *serai*-s are

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[1]William Hodges was one of the well-known British painters during the latter part of the 18th century.

poor people, who furnish a small bedstead for the traveller to sleep on, and who are rewarded by a trifling sum, amounting to perhaps a penny English. The Mahomedan is, in general, a generous man compared with the Hindoo on these occasions. Opposite the Bengal gate is another *serai*; which, however, is nothing more than merely an opening through the wall.

From Mongheir, I embarked and returned by water to Calcutta; and here I had an opportunity of observing a series of scenery perfectly new; the different boats of the country, and the varied shores of the Ganges. This immense current of water suggests rather the idea of an ocean than of a river, the general breadth of it being from two to five miles, and in some places more. The largest boats sailing up or passing down, appear, when in the middle of the stream, as mere points, and the eastern shore only as a dark line marking the horizon. The rivers I have been in Europe, even the Rhine, appear as rivulets in comparison with this enormous mass of water. I do not know a more pleasant amusement than sailing down the Ganges in the warm season; the air, passing over the great reaches of the river many miles in length, is so tempered as to feel delightfully refreshing. After sunset the boats are generally moored close to the banks, where the shore is bold, and near a *gunge* or market, for the accommodation of the people. It is common, on the banks of the river, to see small Hindoo temples, with *ghat*-s or passages, and flights of steps to the river. In the mornings, at or after sunrise, the women bathe in the river; and the younger part, in particular, continue a considerable time in the water, sporting and playing like Naiads or Sirens. To a painter's mind, the fine antique figures never fail to present themselves, when he observes a beautiful female form ascending these steps from the river, with wet drapery, which perfectly displays the whole person, and with vessels on their heads, carrying water to the temples. A sight no less novel or extraordinary is the *Brahmins* at their orisons; perfectly abstracted, for the time, to every passing object however attractive. These devotees are generally naked, except a small piece of drapery round the middle.

A surprising spirit of cleanliness is to be observed among the Hindoos; the streets of their villages are commonly swept and watered, and sand is frequently strewn before the doors of the houses. The simplicity, and perfectly modest character, of the Hindoo women, cannot but arrest the attention of a stranger. With downcast eye, and equal step, they proceed along, and scarcely turn to the right or to the left to observe a foreigner as he passes, however new or singular his appearance. The men are no less remark-

able for their hospitality and are constantly attentive to accommodate the traveller in his wants. During the whole of the journey in my *pallankeen*, whatever I wanted, as boiling water for my tea, milk, eggs and c & c, I never met with imposition or delay, but always experienced an uncommon readiness to oblige, and that accompanied with manners the simplest and accommodating.

Annexure-B

Discussion on Distraint of Cultivators' Property in Bengal

[IOR: Bengal Board of Revenue Proceedings (as per footnote No. 19 in previous section). **Emphasis added by author**.]

Mr. Law: 19.7.1790

The zamindaris proprietor of the soil, it is now everywhere allowed, but this is more clearly expressed by saying he is proprietor of one-tenth of its produce. With the remaining nine-tenths he has not the smallest connection.

Minute of Mr. Thomas Law, member Board of Revenue: 15.12.1790.

In England where the Lord is not so liable to inability of liquidation of the light land tax by any delay he is allowed to distrain. How much more requisite than is such permission in this country where the Government take nine-tenths of the proprietor's assets, and temporarily oust him upon failure; indeed, the right to distrain seems a natural resumption of one's own crop upon the under tenants, or the security's declining to give the equivalent engaged for, and the only measure to cause punctuality whilst for its abuse exemplary damages may be given.

Minute of Mr. Vanderheyden: 15.12.1790

I agree with Mr. Law in thinking that the right to distrain is an indispensable natural power of any *zamindar over* his own property when the party contracting with him fails in fulfilling the conditions of his contract, and when he is bound to perform other engagements which the adherence of others to those, they have made with him can alone enable him to perform. I think also that this authority is complied in every engagement between a *zamindar* and undertenant of every description.

Minute of Mr. Chapman: 15.12.1790.

I am of opinion that *zamindar*-s and head farmers should be allowed the powers of distraint, and the restrictions and penalties, under which Mr.Vanderheyden proposes they should exercise it, appear to me well calculated to prevent the abuse of it.

Mr. Graham: 15.12.1790

Considering the objections to which the authorities now universally authorised by every description of landholder over their under-tenants and ryots are liable, and which are detailed with great ability by our secretary in his report, on his deputation to Seroopoor, recorded on our proceedings of the 8th April last, together with the consequent recommendations of this Board to his Lordship in Council in the remedies therein suggested, I am decidedly of opinion that previous to formally vesting the *zamindar*-s and farmers with the power of distraining for rents, under the restrictions proposed by Mr. Vanderheyden, and such others as may upon further consideration of the subject be found necessary, the petty courts of justice, recommended in the former resolution ought to be established.

I agree with the Board in approving the restrictions recommended by Mr. Vanderheyden.

The *tehsildar*-s will supply the place of the petty officer for investigating trivial causes till the Governor General in Council can take up the proposition of Mr. Harrington in his excellent Seroopoor report.

Resolution of Board of Revenue: 15.12.1790

Resolved it be recommended to the Governor General in Council to allow to all landholders and farmer a power of distraining for rents due to them from their tenants and under renters, under the restrictions proposed by Mr. Vanderheyden, and such further restrictions as may be hereafter found expedient.

Board of Revenue to Government: 15.12.1790

Considering the delays and losses to which landholders and farmers may be liable from not having the power of distraining for arrears of rent until the collector shall have adjusted the accounts between them and their tenants and under-renters, we beg leave to recommend it be made a regulation, that all landholders and farmers of land may distrain for rents due to them from their tenants and under-renters under the following restrictions, and such other as may be hereafter found expedient.

Reply of Bengal Government: 24.12.1790

It appears to us that the existing regulations vest sufficient powers in the landholders to enable them to realize their rents, from their under-tenants and *ryots*, and that the latter may at all times by a prosecution in the revenue Adawlut, obtain ample redress for any oppression which may be exercised upon them by the *zamindar-s*. **Should experience however hereafter evince the necessity of extending the power of distraint already vested in the zamindar-s, we shall upon your representation take the subject into further consideration.**

On your letter to the collector of Chittagong we must observe that the present exigencies of Government can have no relation with the collection of the public revenue, in the exaction of which you are at all times to consider the general regulations alone as the rules for your guidance.

Representation of Board of Revenue to Bengal Government forwarding letter of J.H. Harrington, Commissioner Rajashahee of 23.6.1792:

Rajashahee Commissioner 23.6.1792:

In England it has been found necessary to allow landlords to distrain and sell, under restrictions, the personal chattels of their tenants for the speedy recovery of arrears of rent; and perhaps a similar authority to the landholders and renters in this country may be the least objectionable power that can be entrusted to them under proper precautions to prevent as much as possible an abuse of it. Of this however the board and Governor General in Council are the proper judges and as it has been heretofore under their consideration, I forbear enlarging further on it, though I have thought it is my duty to notice it under the conviction I feel of the urgent necessity of an explicit rule of conduct being prescribed for the guidance of the landholders and farmers in the collection of their rents; and affording them more effectual support than they can receive from a judicial process only.

Reply of Government to Board of Revenue: 20.7.1792

We transmit to you for your information and guidance the enclosed Regulations vesting landholders and farmers of land with a power of distraining and causing to be sold certain property belonging to their under-renters, *ryots* or dependent *talukadar-s* for realizing arrears of rent of revenue that may be due from them.

Annexure-C

Gentoo Internal Government on the Coast of Choromandel

[From Alexander Dalrymple. *A Short Account of the Gentoo Mode of Collecting the Revenue on the Coast of Choromandel, London, 1783.* Emphasis added by author.][2]

1. The *Gentoo Government* was, unquestionably, the *best* that ever existed; and the *Remains* of this Government still subsist on the *Choromandel* Coast, but with a number of Foreign Incumbrances; The Excellence of the *Gentoo Government* cannot be more clearly demonstrated, than by observing that the *Revenues* to the Government are *certain fixed proportions* of the *Produce* of the *Land*, paid *in kind*; and that *every village* is a *small Community* within itself, living under the protection of *The State*, but *governed* by *Its Own Inhabitants.*
2. Each village has many *Public Officers*, such as the Headman to execute Justice, the Conicopoly to keep the Accounts of the village, the Cornmeter, the Smith, the Barber & c., more considerable villages have their Doctor, Astrologer & c., and all the public Officers have Shares of the General Produce.
3. There is (except Houses and Gardens) no *Individual Property of Land.* The Cultivation of Lands, belonging to each village, being carried on, by the Community of the village, and the Produce partitioned in certain proportions.
4. Although there is no Individual property of Lands, yet Individual have, in some cases, a distinct Interest: This, in the Accounts, is called *Free-Gifts-Lands* (*manyam*-s): partly what is denominated the *Village-*

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[2]Alexander Dalrymple was a major Scot cartographer during the latter part of the eighteenth century, especially for the Indian and Pacific region. He was also in Madras, for many years in the 1770s and also was a member of the Madras Governor's Council. He edited several volumes of essays on various aspects of India during 1790s. There is a recent biography on A. Dalrymple, especially on his cartographical work.

Establishment, comprehending the *Glebe-Lands* settled on the Public Officers, & c. under two heads of Old and New; the former, I conceive, what have been from Time immemorial; the *latter* of a modern date; partly to *Strangers*, of two kinds; *Inaum* where no *acknowledgement*, or quit-rent, is paid; and *Shotrium* where the quit-rent or acknowledgement, is a *small proportion* of the real value of the Lands. All these Lands, I conceive, are cultivated by the *community*, as well as those called *Circar Grounds*, when the *drearor Government* receive a portion of the Produce.

5. The *Pagodas* and Brahmin-s have a share of the produce of the Lands; If I am not mistaken, *The church* [temples, etc.] has its share in *the first instance*: this not only inculcates the Reverence and Respect due to Religion, but a better check against embezzlement could not be devised.

6. A certain proportion is allotted to preserve the Tanks and Water Courses, and this is taken out of the *Gross Produceof* the *Lands*, before any Partition is made between *Government* and the Inhabitants: and it appears the *Free-Gifts-Lands* paid a *greater share* for the *repairof Tanks*, than the *Circar Grounds*.

7. Regular Accounts of the *annual* Produce are kept in the Pagodas.

14. The leading Principle of their Religion is Charity and Benevolence: The destruction of certain Trees beneficial to Society, I have heard, was amongst the almost inexpiable Crimes; and the building and endowing *Choultri-s*, for the accommodation of Travellers, was the great object of Individual Emulation, by which their names were to be commemorated to Posterity.

33. There is no mode of manuring the Lands in India more beneficial than Sheep; and, on this account, the Inhabitants are always unwilling to part with their *Sheep*', which were often taken from them by constraint to supply the (British) Troops: To obviate this Inconvenience, I proposed, that a number of Sheep should be bought, by the Company, in Countries where they are bred, to stock the Jaghire (most of present district of Chengalpattu) Lands; and that the Inhabitants should have had the advantage of their produce and manure: accounting to the company for the Original Stock, which would be called for to supply the necessary wants of the Garrison and Troops; by this means a regular supply would be had, without distressing the Country: I think

where the Sheep are bred, the price is from 7 to 9 for a Pagoda; the Garrison are supplied at 5 for a Pagoda.

The Friend, before mentioned, reminded me of one very important part of the Gentoo Establishment; **the Watch; "the Polygar (Palegar) has a custom or Duty on everything, and he is answerable for everything that is lost in the District. No mode can more effectually prevent Theft and Robbery than obliging the Officer to make good the loss; Even in my memory, this Regulation subsisted at Madras; and, I think in Governor Saunders' Administration, Complaint was made to the President and Council, by an European living in the Black-Town, that the Pettanaique (Palegar) refused to make good what had been stolen: the Pettanaiqueor Polygar replied, that this Person, being an European, did not pay the duty to him, and consequently was not entitled to any indemnification: Perhaps it requires Indian-Honesty to make such an Institution efficacious; for in this Country [Britain], Claims would probably be made on the Officer, for pretended losses, to an extent which the wealth of Croesus could not satisfy; or the law teach him to evade payment of actual losses till the day of Judgement".**

Annexure-D

Land Rights and Village Organisation

[By S. Lushington, Collector of Tinnevelly and Ramnad Pollams, in his report to the Madras Board of Revenue dated 29th December 1800. (as per footnote no. 21 given in previous section)].[3]

92. As it is in every point of view of the highest importance that the nature of the rights to be ceded to the proprietary landlords be thoroughly understood before the lands are sold, I shall first explain the nature of the tenures, under which all the land in the Tinnevelly Pollams, in Ramnad and in Shivagunga district, excepting manyam-s and Church (manyam-s for temples and other religious purposes) lands, may be comprehended.

    Firstly: Villages of the AgrahrahVadikyor villages of which the absolute proprietary right is chiefly held by *Brahmins*.

    Secondly: Villages of the PundarahVadiky, or villages of which the absolute proprietary right is chiefly held by *Soodra*inhabitants.

    Thirdly: Villages which having gone to perfect waste, *Soodra*inhabitants were invited to occupy and to cultivate them.

93. First of the AgrahrahVadiky. This tenure usually takes its name from the *Brahmins*, not only from their being inhabitants of the superior caste, but from the village being originally bestowed on them, and because they profess the chief authority amongst the inhabitants. It has been acquired in various ways, but chiefly it is presumed by Rulers, or other personages of rank and opulence giving them originally as endowments to communities of *Brahmins* and by buying them from others for this particular purpose. This property has of course in the lapses of many years undergone many changes, and has been universal-

[3]The report, running into 108 paragraphs, is given in Board's Collections volume 132 (No. 2406) on *pages* 153-308 taken from Board of Revenue Proceedings of 22.1.1801. This extract is taken from *pages*279-96.

ly transferred, sold and purchased at the pleasure of the owners. It is essential to the validity of every transfer, that it be sanctioned and authenticated by every individual concerned in the property of his village. The property itself is denominated *Pungor or Bahgum*, literally signifying share and proportion. Four of these Pungs constitute what is termed a *Caray*, and each village is said to consist of so many Pungs, and each individual's share of so many *Caray*, more or less. The right of property in the proportion of these shares, is ascertained in the village *Koshan*, which is an accurate register of this property in the same manner, as the *fyacum accountis* of its lands. The right of *Caray* rarely conveys a right to any proprietor to any specific spot of land in perpetuity, and whenever this practice prevails, it seems a departure from the original institution. The property of the whole village is common to the whole number of proprietors. Every transaction of revenue, every matter of loss and gain is common to them all, to the extent of their respective shares, and as they are all jointly and separately responsible for the revenue of the village according to strict construction of their tenures; so they are all alike equally entitled to any emolument or advantage which may arise therefrom. So tenacious indeed are they of this established right of every village benefit being in common, that a sort of lottery takes place at stated times to make a new distribution of village lands, by which they change owners for a certain period, until the lottery is renewed. By this means, they generally continue to pass from one proprietor to another, so as to extend effectually indeed the right of the general body to the whole village or common.

94. Secondly Villages of the PundarahVadiky. Though the natives invariably make the distinction, it appears in fact more a distinction of caste than of tenure; since the difference is characterised by nothing more than that the influence of *Brahmins*, and their property, predominates in the AgrahrahVadiky. The former rarely allowing *soodras to* intermix in their villages, for fear their importance and estimation as a community of *Brahmins* may be diminished by a connection with such inferior parties; and on the other hand, the *soodras as* carefully and jealously avoiding the admission of *Brahmins*, from the well-founded apprehension, that the *Brahmins*, however small their property, would draw to themselves too much consideration, usurp all authority, and invade their rights. This natural suspicion and jealousy together with religious distinction, has therefore occasioned that separation of them which is

generally to be observed, and has had force to prevent, what the sale and transfer of lands was so powerfully calculated to bring about, the indiscriminate existence of castes in the property of villages. For your special consideration, I shall here annex translation of a Bill of sale from one rayet to another, upon the occasion of dispersing of one or more shares in a village of the Pundarah or AgrahrahVadiky, and accompanying you will find translations and copies of similar documents.

The deed usually commences with a specification of the day of the week, the age of the month, the day, month, and year of the Malabar Andoo, or Cycle of sixty years, the year of the *Saulevaganah Sagarthum* and the *Calyoogum* age, together with the auspicious and happy position of the celestial bodies, and then commonly proceeds in terms to the following effect.

I AB of the village of C containing 28 shares do hereby execute to DE of the same village this deed of sale; that is to say having sold to you in this village one share of my own six shares therein, I do hereby execute to you this deed of the full and absolute sale thereof, and you having further paid, and I having actually received, one hundred *chuks*duly shroffed in full value thereof, you are accordingly to the extent of the share now transferred and sold to you, fully to possess and enjoy all nunjah, poonjah lands, water, stone, topes, jungle riches, treasure, and every well which sinks beneath, or every tree that rises above the earth, with every general benefit of every sort, from father to son through every generation, as long as the waters of the Cauvery flow, vegetation lasts, or until the end of time, with the fullest liberty likewise of alternations by gift, bequest, sale or otherwise; and you enjoy all prosperity therewith. Thus, with my fullest approbation I do hereby execute to DE, this deed of sale, which is written by Permaul Pilly, the village Conicopoly, and thus requires authentication from all the other proprietors of the village.

95. This document contains within itself the best evidence of the sense which the natives entertain of the right acquired or alienated, under its sanction by the comprehension and absolute terms in which that right is defined; and nothing remains to be remarked but that while its style, is not the style of the present times, so the adoption of such a deed must have been the consequence of the universal acknowledgement of the right it is meant to convey.

96. Thirdly, the last general division comprised all those lands which the inhabitants are not considered at liberty to sell. They unquestionably form a very large proportion of the country and are generally occupied by *soodra* inhabitants. Though frequently confounded with villages of the Pundarah Vadiky and escheated to the state from the demise of all the proprietors; or whether they were barren wastes before the inhabitants who now occupy them were invited to cultivate, it is not possible to ascertain, or if possible, would any benefit result from it. It is sufficient for us to know that the grounds thus occupied from the time that they were divided among the first settlers, have in most cases continued to pass from one generation to another, that the land of each inhabitant is as well-known as his house, and that it has never been customary to disturb his possession so long as he yielded to the ruler of the country a certain share of his labours. The distinction of these villages from those of the genuine *Pundarah*and *Agrahrah Vadiky* consists in their never having been purchased, and in there being no practices prevailing in them of *Pung-s*, *Caray-s*, or *Koshe* confor the lands of the village in general, or any right indeed in the inhabitants to dispose of or alienate in perpetuity the lands they occupy as is possessed by the proprietors of the *Pundarah*and *Agraharah Vadiky*.

97. From year to year each *rayet* cultivates his own land, unless distress come upon him, or the supply of water be partial. In the one case, he lends or mortgages his right of cultivation to redeem it when he has again the means. In the other (in the case of *nunjah* land) all the inhabitants of the village assemble and having determined the extent of land that may be cultivated from the quantum of water in the tanks, it is apportioned out and to each inhabitant, according to the extent of *nunjah* land possessed by him in the village. When the crops have been cut, every inhabitant again returns to his own land.

98. In explaining to you the nature of these tenures I have not sought to avoid detail, assured that your solicitude to be thoroughly informed of every difficulty to be avoided in the permanent settlement of these countries, will prompt a favourable construction of any apparent prolixity in the details transmitted to you of their present actual state.

99. In tracing their past situation, it is not to be discovered that during the revolutions of many ages, from the reign of their first princes until the final downfall of the Hindoo authority, any question ever existed in any stage of the Hindoo history, as to the rights of the people to the

lands of the country, excepting villages or lands totally waste, and that had escheated to government. On the contrary they appear to have been transmitted to them from the most remote era down to the present time, without interruption. These rights are supported by usages which could never have prevailed but for their universal acknowledgement; and in the repositories of their history and their laws, we find the right of the people to property in lands, repeatedly acknowledged and preserved.

100. It has been the custom, to consider the Hindoo governments of old, despotic, and regulated solely by the arbitrary will of the reigning prince; theoretically viewed they were so, but in practice they had little of this character. The ordinances of their religion have generally the force and effect of laws, and in their operation they were beneficent and just. Even when the country was in later times ravaged by Musulman armies, and the adoption of the laws of Mohamed into the Hindoo jurisprudence, created universal confusion and engendered continual differences in the decrees of justice, no fundamental material innovations took place in the right to landed property, (however grievous the public assessment often proved) such as I have described, and the privilege of tilling the glebe which he first broke and brought into fertility, it has never been the custom to take away from the poorest cultivator, so long as he duly yielded the public share. It is true that infringements of this right occur more frequently in Shivagunga, and in the Tinnevelly Pollams than elsewhere, but the frequency of them has not altered the general sentiments of their injustice.

Annexure-E

Illustrations of British Usurial Practices in India

[Minute of Lord Hobart, Governor, Madras Presidency, 24th October 1795, House of Commons Papers (as per footnote no. 60, given in previous section). Emphasis given by author.]

The proposed arrangement which have been brought into discussion since the death of his Highness the Nabob Wallajah, make it necessary for me to advert with more minuteness than has been usual upon the Public Records, to the system on which the Administration of his Revenue has been conducted, because it manifestly shows the necessity of that change which it is my object to accomplish, both in respect to the country itself, which, though under the immediate control of his Highness, it is the duty of this Government, in a general point of view, to cherish and protect; and in respect to the security which has been pledged to the Company for the support of their Military Establishment, and for the discharge of the Consolidated Debts guaranteed by Parliament to the private creditors of his Highness the Nabob. I shall, therefore, in this Minute lay before the Board the information which I have collected, and the consequent observations which have occurred to me, **upon the usurious loans which it has long been the practice (principally among the European Gentlemen of the Presidency) to make to the Durbar, for mortgages upon the different provinces of the Carnatic;** and, here, I may be allowed to express my belief, that though the Honourable Court of Directors have been extremely pointed in their orders and observations against this practice, the continuance of it has been owing in some measure to the want of that candid exposition of the fact, which it is my intention to make.

The Southern Districts of the Nabob's country, and Tinnevelly in particular, as being the most distant from the presidency, have been the theatre in which these scenes have been chiefly exhibited; but it is notorious that similar practices have been introduced, and are now actually in use, in

Nellore, Arcot, and Trichinopoly.

The transaction commences at Madras, where the kist-s of his Highness are payable, and is opened by an agreement between the Nabob and some one of the principal houses of business, or even some of the Company's servants, for the payment of a certain sum into the Treasury on account of his Highness's public engagements. The advancers of this money, knowing from experience that a simple mortgage would be insufficient security, unless the means of reimbursing themselves should be placed in their own hands, find it necessary not only that a person of their own nomination should be appointed to the management of .the mortgaged province, but that there should be a vigilant superintendence and a powerful support of the concern upon the spot, hence the expediency of a connection between them and the military commanding officer in the Districts; he also finds it advantageous to embark in the speculation, because he thereby adds considerable weight to his own interest, and because it facilitates the means of raising money to carry on his part of the concern. From this connection both parties derive ample security for their money by the absolute power of the one in command upon the spot, and by the weighty influence of the other in command of monied interest at Madras. This outline is filled up by a further connection with the person who appears to receive the appointment of aumildar or Manager from the Nabob; hence it is either stipulated that a person chosen by the money lenders at Madras shall be nominated to manage the District, or where men of rank may have already been appointed as Foujdar-s by his Highness, the same effect is produced by a communication between him, the commanding officer, and the money lenders, previous to the agreement for a loan at the Durbar. The combination is in this latter case completed by the appointment of a Tehsildar on the part of the money lenders, and thence forward produces a uniform, consistent, and connected operation. His Highness having by **this arrangement,** obtained his principal object, provision for the payment of his kist, without any immediate disbursement from himself,**delivers his people and his province up to the control and power of the Manager, evidently without regard to their situation; because, as his terms with the money lenders necessarily provide for the removal of all restraint from the governing power, so he must expect that the Manager, who can have no interest in the future prosperity of the Country, will have recourse to every means by which he may hope to bear himself and his connections harmless, and that within the shortest time possible.**

The interest allowed by the sirkar varies in different places and depends not a little upon the influence which the lender may happen to have at the Durbar: at a medium however it may be stated at 4 per cent per month, besides the pay of all the servants employed by the junto in receiving the Revenue. This last charge is always a fixed sum at the expense of the Nabob, considerably above the actual expense incurred by the Tehsildar, and the difference is considered amongst the customary advantages of the concern. The Manager arrived within his District immediately assembles his under-managers, aumildar-s, and renters, and then ensues the second part of this oppressive system: The Tehsildaris importunate, and the Manager must find means of satisfying his demands –subordinate soukar-s, native as well as European, are called upon for assistance. The soukar makes his advance; and in the first instance, the aumildar or Renter of the Districts, assigned over as security for such advance, grants his bond until other securities shall be forthcoming: these are either the bonds of the inhabitants or grain. In time about three-fourths of the sum are secured to the soukar by grain made over to him, and placed under charge of his servants; and for the other one-fourth the bonds of the inhabitants are made over for that part of the Revenue payable by them to the sirkar in ready money upon the cultivation of dry grain, & c. Those are frequently forced from them at the commencement of the season, which consequently compels them to anticipate the crops, and pay interest upon money before it be due from them.

At this period of the transaction, the soukars ends his servants and peons into the country, with an order from the Nabob's Manager to the guards placed therein **to afford every assistance (as it is generally called), but in fact to obey them implicitly in collecting the amount of the bonds from the inhabitants.** Anxiety to secure so precarious a property, naturally leads the soukar to adopt such measures as power enables him, and the custom of the country authorises. Then follows this process: **if the ryot is dilatory in the discharge of his bond he is confined without victuals, beaten with rods and compelled to pay batta to those very peons and guards who are the means of his confinement and punishment.** In this manner, I am credibly informed, that an inhabitant who grants his bond for 100 *chuckrum*-s (nearly 40 pagoda-s) is compelled, before he is released from the consequences, to pay from 110 to 115 *chuckrum*-s, according to circumstances. If his credit or his other means is exhausted, which is too often the case, he must necessarily dispose of some part of his stock, which consists of cattle and seed grain.

The first part of the system which I have stated, describes the original cause at the fountain head: the second comprises the detail which springs out of it; in both the considerations of the means which are immediately employed, and of the effect which it may produce upon the future revenue, is abandoned; and **while the grand mover of these effects is at a distance from the scene, and the subordinate instrument is hardened by practice, conscience is lulled to rest by the delusive opiate of interest upon interest.**

Thus far I have traced the progress of a loan secured upon the bonds of the inhabitants – it will be not less politic for me to pursue it to the disposal of the paddy.

The first endeavour of those who are engaged in a concern of this nature is, to enhance the price of grain by artificial means, lest the ordinary price of that article, the sole subsistence of the natives, should fail to answer the large advance of money and the exorbitant advantage expected upon it by the soukar. The means of effecting this purpose is easy; for the necessitous condition of the *ryots* compels them to dispose of their grain as soon as it comes into their possession, in order to satisfy the urgent demands upon them which I have already described – the purchasers of this grain monopolise it until the demand, which increases with the consumption, advances the price: if, towards the expiration of the season, any part of the grain should yet remain on hand, the expedient is, to divide the whole quantity, in whatever condition, it may be, among the inhabitants, and to force it upon them by *guddyum*. This *guddyum*, it appears, compels the people (in general the manufacturers) to receive grain at a valuation considerably above the market price; and it would seem to be of ancient establishment and current practice; for in the agreement which I was successful in negotiating with his late Highness the Nabob *Wallajah*, for placing a portion of the Tinnevelly weavers under the immediate superintendence of the Company's Resident, his Highness has expressly reserved, nor could he be prevailed upon to relinquish, the right of his sirkar to exercise this *guddyum*.

The inferior servants of the sirkar, whose duty should be to watch over the public interests, are placed under the arbitrary control of the money lenders without whose permission not an *anna* can be expended nor a measure of grain issued, except by stealth: indeed I understand, that upon the arrival of a soukar or his representative in a mortgaged District, the usual custom is, to notify his authority throughout the villages, and to prohibit the expenditure of grain or money but by his order; this prohibition

extends to the ordinary charges of *pagodas*, *manyam*-s, and *sibbendy*; and when an order is granted from the Sudder Cutcherry for any of these purposes, the persons receiving the sunud must wait at the Cutcherry of the money lender for a confirmation of his right.

Instead of receiving relief by tukavy (or advances for cultivation) at the proper season, by which to replace their cattle, and to provide seed for extending their cultivation, the inhabitants are often obliged to sacrifice both to their own immediate wants and the rapacity of the soukar; of course, no system of regulation can prevail, and every hope of improvement must be relinquished. Some of the means for enhancing the price of grain I have already related, but the subject is exhaustless. The poligars have been prevented by the Manager of Tinnevelly from selling within the sirkar lands the grain which is allowed them for dash cavelly (or watching fees); and I should hesitate to advance, if I was not supported by the authority of public record, that during a late scarcity of grain in the Southern provinces, Ektabar Khan, the Nabob's Manager, had the hardiness to write a public complaint to the Company's Collector against the *Poligar-s* for selling grain to the inhabitants; nor was the evil removed without the interposition of this Government, who, by sending vessels loaded with grain, induced the monopolisers, from regard to their own interest, to restore their usual supplies to the market: yet did the Company not escape the effects of this monopoly, for they were reduced to the necessity of purchasing grain at the price to which the monopolisers had raised it, for the subsistence of those troops who were stationed there for the protection of his Highness's territories.

After this exposition no comment can be required to show that this species of Government, if it deserves the name of Government, contains the most grievous oppression of the people, the certain impoverishment of the country, and consequently the inevitable decay of Revenue; but it will be useful to shew the particular manner in which it affects the resources of his Highness the Nawaub.

It is estimated, and I believe not with exaggeration, that the Province of Tinnevelly alone is annually mortgaged upon the terms I have described, to the amount of 3,00,000 pagodas; and calculating the period for which interest is paid upon the whole sum, at six months, the amount of interest, at 4 per cent per month, is 72,000. The charges paid by the sirkar for the *sibbendy* of the money lenders, during that period, cannot amount to less than 3,000. The amount of loss therefore to the Sirkar, on this transaction is, *pagoda*-s 75,000.

That an individual gentleman should, in less than three years, amass a fortune of more than £50,000, would be a matter of wonder, if this statement did not at the same time afford a solution of the difficulty, and a proof of its own correctness.

But the scene is not closed here: Besides the dealings of the principal soukar-s with the Head Manager, there are subordinate transactions of a similar nature among the inferior officers, and those who possess but smaller means for usurious practices, amounting in all perhaps from fifty thousand to a lakh of *pagoda*-s; this brings an additional expense upon the sirkar, because interest is allowed on all advances made by the renters on pressing occasions, before the *kist-s* are due, and on the other hand, the inhabitants are not exempt from a part of this expense, which is imposed upon them by fine, forfeiture, or *guddyum*, in order that he may be enabled to make the advance, upon which he receives interest.

As the manager is under engagements to pay the fullest computed value of the district, he is justified, according to the custom of the country, in availing himself of every possible resource. A proportion of the church (temples and *matham*-s, etc.) allowances is withheld; the pay of all descriptions of servants is kept in long arrear, and in particular the *sibbendy sepoys* a small advance indeed, is sometimes made for subsistence; but their principal resource (and it is not unproductive) is in the *batta*, which they receive by acknowledged practice while doing the duty of *sezawul*-s, and in the dexterous management of the power which that service gives them to extort presents for their forbearance. The Manager knows from experience, that in the event of assuming the country, the English Government will be induced, either from motives of humanity to attend to the calls of these unhappy people, or from motives of policy to satisfy the clamours of a mutinous and undisciplined rabble. Thus at the very time when the exigencies of Government became most pressing, a part of their resources, which ought to be immediate, is appropriated to the liquidation of arrears.

If this is a true history of the present management, it may be asked, why an immediate and large defalcation of the Revenue does not follow; for the operation of such system as I have described tends directly to the point of ruin? Nothing less than the hand of arbitrary power could avert it, even for a time. In proportion as the means of cultivation decrease, the price of grain is enhanced; and it is a notorious but inhuman maxim of Eastern [i.e. of the system introduced by the British] finances that a year of scarcity is more productive than a year of plenty to the sirkar; because, as a

given number of mouths can only consume a proportionable quantity of grain, the immediate advantage or disadvantage of government arises from the price at which that given quantity is sold. In years of plenty the superfluous grain is in a great measure useless, owing to the partial and difficult means of exportation: – in years of scarcity the same given quantity is required for the subsistence of the people; and as the demand is greater than the supply, an increase of the price is produced by the usual effects of a competition in the market.

Though the dealings of soukar-s in the collection of the revenue are not of recent establishment, yet the terms of loans have never been carried to so usurious an extent as since the practice has been introduced among Europeans; and though the inevitable effects of it may be protracted by the harsh expedients of an arbitrary Government, yet no man who reflects upon such a system can doubt that the resources of the country have been undermined; that the wealth of the people is exhausted ; and that a principle of decline has been established which is now precipitating the Carnatic, with accumulated weight and rapidity, to destruction. Impressed as I am with a serious conviction of this truth, I cannot but look with extreme anxiety to the nature of the security provided by the Treaty of 1792, for those resources on which the British interests on the Coast of Coromandel materially depend; I cannot but see that the present system of collecting the revenue of the Carnatic manifestly invalidates that security, and that, whenever a failure may happen in the payment of his Highness's *kist-s,* we shall in vain have recourse to it for the recovery of the defalcation. As those payments, though avowedly moderate in their extent are now kept up by the extraordinary means which I have described, so it is reasonable to suppose that a failure, whenever it may happen, will arise from the total impoverishment of the people. In taking possession of a District under such circumstances, for the amount of a *kist* which will then have fallen in arrear, we shall, instead of finding the immediate means of reimbursement, become charged with an exhausted country, requiring all the liberal assistance and fostering attention of a lenient and indulgent government. It is not only that our means will be curtailed at our greatest need, but that humanity and policy will call upon us for advances of money, at a time when our expenses will be most burthensome. This is an embarrassment from which the known resources of this government are unequal to extricate us; and it is a dilemma unprovided for by the Treaty of 1792; for the objects of that Treaty are, the payment of a debt guaranteed by Parliament,

which we are not at liberty to postpone; and the discharge of military pay, which cannot be interrupted without danger to the state.

To avert the consequences of an evil big with such imminent danger, is an object that merits the most serious as well as the most unwearied attention of this Government: and it is a matter of very great mortification to me, that seeing the progress of this calamity, and anticipating as I do its pestiferous effects, I am compelled to acknowledge, that the means of arresting its course is extremely difficult.

The prohibitary orders hitherto published have all failed of their object, because the evasion of them is easy to Europeans, through the agency of their native servants, and because the enormous profits, which arise from those usurious loans, hold out an irresistible temptation to adventurers. To prohibit the intercourse of Europeans at the Durbar is ineffectual; other channels of communication are open; and the superintendent of an usurious loan at *Palamcottah*, conveys his demands to the ears of the Nabob with no less certainty than he who lives in the precincts of Chepauk: as long therefore as his Highness shall be so regardless of his true interests, as to deliver up his provinces and his people to public depredation, so long will there be found men who, in the pursuit of extravagant advantages, will overleap the bounds of discretion and of moral obligation.

So desperate a malady requires a remedy that shall reach its source; and I have no hesitation in stating my opinion, that there is no mode of eradicating the disease but by removing the original cause, and placing those Districts which are pledged for the security of his *kist-s* beyond the reach of his Highness's management. The disposition which his Highness has already evinced to support such an arrangement, leaves me in no doubt of the real cause. **It is not possible to calculate the extent and variety of interests which are involved in this one pursuit; and though they are subdivided in every direction of the Carnatic, yet at the call of danger they all rally round a common centre. The great houses of business, who are the principal money lenders at the Durbar, borrow from individuals, who, though not absolutely engaged in the loan itself, are partakers of the speculation in a remote degree, and feel with no less sensibility than their principals the approach of danger; similarity of interest makes it a common cause; and the great body of influence which is condensed upon this principle, is uniformly exerted to support his Highness the Nabob in an inflexible resistance against a melioration of system, and to oppose a reformation which I consider essential to the national welfare.**

In the proposition which I have made to his Highness the Nabob, I am aware that I have offered great concessions on the part of the Company; but, with the impression of the evils I have stated strongly on my mind, I could not but consider the object I had in view above every idea of a pecuniary nature, even if the system of the Nabob's Government was not in itself calculated completely to annihilate every source of Revenue.

4

The Question of Backwardness

(A Tentative Approach)

[Presented at a seminar on Backwardness at the Gandhian Institute of Studies, Varanasi, December 1982]

As perhaps never before in history, India is fast becoming two distinct societies unlinked, un in teracting, leading apparently parallel existence. The first consists of a proportionately tiny section (yet, perhaps, numbering several millions) whose ideas, affinities, inspiration, and even entertainment are derived from the world outside India. Not all in this society necessarily lead a life of luxury. Many in it perhaps live fairly austerely and consider themselves devoted to ancient Indian values, to socialism, even to the universal ideas of Mahatma Gandhi. But all of them one way or another are linked to positions of power and initiative and it has come to pass that without their concurrence nothing can be initiated in India at the public level. A large section of this outward looking society is without doubt sophisticated, soft-spoken, also compassionate in the abstract. All the same, by a twist of fate, what symbolises this society most is foreign trade and travel (modem gadgetry, air travel, multi-storey hotels, and all the rest) and the unending concern for foreign aid and exchange. These two seem to be the most visible gods of this society.

The other society is constituted of the rest. It is not one homogenous whole, however, and has multi fold divisions, great disparities amongst sections of it, and much of it leads an increasingly disorganized existence. Further, half of this society perhaps has begun to live marginal lives. But what indicates its oneness is that for most practical purposes this other society is fast becoming wholly dependent on the former, outward-looking society, which holds the reins of power and initiative. The other element which characterizes it is that for most purposes it still continues to function according to indigenous idioms and beliefs, even when it has taken to mod-

ern technical practices, etc. and thus far is unable to comprehend, much less master the idiom of the powerful. Many sons and daughters of this society undoubtedly aspire to pass over from this to the outward-looking and some succeed in doing so. Yet, by and large, this or any other effort do not seem to lead to any real interaction between the two societies but further accentuates their distinctness and separateness.

It is unnecessary perhaps to add that most of those who are assembled here to deliberate on 'backwardness' (which again may be taken as a characteristic of this larger society, or major sections of it), including the writer of this note, themselves belong to the society of the outward-looking. This, however, need not disqualify them from deliberating upon the subject but an awareness of this position can be useful.

II

The concept of what is termed 'backwardness' is usually applied both in the cultural and economic sense. With regard to the cultural, caste seems to be the major symbol of Indian backwardness. But how have we arrived at such a conclusion? Like villages, castes have been invariable constituents of Indian society throughout known history. It is true that according to the Manusmrti,[1] etc., society in India was at a certain stage divided into four *varna*-s, i.e., the *brahmin*-s, *kstriya*-s, *vaisya* -s, and *sudra*-s. According to this same tradition misalliances amongst these four *varna*-s led in the course of time to the formation of numerous castes. Further, that persons from

[1]Since about 1800 it seems to have been increasingly assumed that the Indian scriptural and religious authorities and literature which received most attention from the British and other Europeans must have been that which had interested the Indians most during the eighteenth century. But this need not necessarily have been the case and it is much more probable that what was popular and accepted by the Indians of this period, and during the previous several centuries, was primarily other texts and literature. It was the western intervention into India and its political, legal and intellectual concepts and preferences which seem to have brought forth to western acclaim and acknowledgement texts like the Manusmrti which perhaps for centuries past had rather been put aside by the Indians. That the favourite texts for the Indians, especially in matters of *dharma* and custom, were wholly different comes through the post-1800 writings of F.W. Ellis in Madras, and even from some of the court proceedings of William Jones during the 1780s and 1790s. In terms of custom and legal validity this point becomes even clearer from Arthur Steele's "The Law and Custom of Hindu Castes within the Dekhun Provinces subject to the Presidency of Bombay chiefly affecting Civil Suits" (Bombay, 1827). According to it the general opinion in the area seemed to have been that "custom overrode the *sastras*".

amongst the four *varnas* who for various unpardonable offences were excommunicated from the *varna*-s, along with their progeny, were classed as antyajya (i.e., the *candala*-s, pariah-s, etc.). Yet, according to other traditions, especially traditions which particular castes or tribes subscribe to, each such caste had a uniquely divine origin. According to anthropological theory, castes have largely grown out of earlier tribal groups and in course of time though not fully integrated in the larger body politic have yet accepted its norms and belief structure. In recent centuries to these castes and tribes have been added yet other newly formed groups by the religious conversion of some of the Indian people to the religions of Islam and Christianity. Besides there has been a sprinkling of people from other areas who at one time or another have migrated into India, and while keeping to their own customs have made India their home.

But while castes and tribes have always existed in India and continue to exist today, never before in history do they seem to have posed a major problem. Historically they have existed side by side, they have interacted amongst themselves, groups of them have even had ritual or real fights with each other as the Right-hand and Left-hand caste groupings had in southern India till the beginning of the nineteenth century. Contrary to accepted assumptions, and perhaps to Manusmrti-c law, at least when the British began to conquer India, the majority of the raja-s in different parts of India had also been from amongst such castes which have been placed in the sudra varna. Incidentally, it may be worth noting that those included amongst the *brahmin, ksatriya,* and *vaisya varna-s*, at least inrecent times, have together constituted only a small minority (12 per cent to 15 per cent) of the Hindus.

It is possible that the existence of separate castes and tribes have historically been responsible for the relative weakness of Indian polity. Yet, it can, perhaps also be argued that the existence of castes has added to the tenacity of Indian society, to its capacity to survive and after lying low to be able to stand up again. Under what circumstances and what arrangements

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Though it is hazardous to say so, it is possible that the post-1800 renown of the Bhagwad Gita amongst the literates, especially the English educated, in India, has its beginning in the Western acclaim of it and that books like the Srimada Bhagawatam were what the people of India heard, read and believed in much more till that time. To really know Indian society before 1800 – including even its alleged backwardness – it is essential that serious studies are undertaken by India's younger scholars of the texture and daily routine of Indian society before it began to be influenced by the West including what it wrote (books, commentaries, letters, accounts, etc.) and what it read.

castes (and for that matter tribes) are divisive of Indian society or a factor leading to its cohesion are questions which still have no conclusive answer. In fact, the questions perhaps have not even been posed. For the British, as perhaps for some others before them, caste has been a great obstacle, in fact, an unmitigated evil not because the British believed in castelessness or subscribed to non-hierarchical systems but because it stood in the way of their breaking Indian society, hindered the process of atomisation, and made the task of conquest and governance more difficult. The present fury and the theoretical formulations against the organisation of Indian society into castes, whatever the justification or otherwise of caste today, thus begins with British rule.

Simultaneous to the stigmatising of caste as an evil, the requirements of conquest, and perhaps also a similarity in classification, attracted the British to the Manusmrti and gave scholarly and legal support to some of its provisions, including those relating to the varna-s. A major result of it was to provide validity and traditional sanction to the virtual dispossession of an overwhelming proportion of the Indian people from property or occupancy rights in land and taking away their rights in the management of innumerable cultural and religious institutions which they had hitherto managed. Further, it also led to the erosion of the flexibility of customs which existed amongst most of the castes, and made them feel degraded to the extent they deviated from *Brahminical* practice. The listing of the castes in a rigid hierarchical order was another result of this latter approach. The earlier relationship and balance amongst the castes was thus wholly disrupted.

About a century later, i.e., from about the end of the nineteenth century, various factors began to attempt a reversal of what had resulted from previous British policy. In time, this has led to what today are known as backward caste movements. The manner in which their objectives are presented however, seem to suggest as if the 'backward' status they are struggling against is some ancient phenomenon. In reality their cultural and economic backwardness (as distinct from their ritualistic status on specific occasions) is post-1800, and what basically all such movements are attempting to achieve is to restore back the position, status, and rights they had prior to 1800.

III

While the people of India may have historically suffered from many ills, especially from foreign invasions and the plunder, desecration of religious

and cultural places, and political subjection of many areas that such aggression at times led to, they at no time seem to have felt that they in any sense were a lesser people or in modern idiom were suffering from backwardness. This was but natural. For it is seldom that individuals, groups and communities use the term *backwardness* to describe their own state. It may be that they lead a hard and harsh existence, as the people of Europe have led till recent times because of environmental and historical causes. For various other reasons a society, or segments of it may at times begin to suffer from marked impoverishment, or be even reduced to a state of pauperization. But such conditions by themselves do not make such sufferers feel that their state is what is called "backwardness". Backwardness like the term "barbarians" is an imagery which one applies to others, to aliens who prove weaker and who do not subscribe to one's own cultural norms. To morally justify the conquest, or subjection, or annihilation of others, recourse is then taken to terms like "backwardness", and when the people so termed, themselves begin mentally to subscribe to such imagery it implies that the process of subjugation of such people has been completed and that they have lost dignity in their own eyes. While there can be some controversy about the prosperity or poverty of the Indian people, or any segments of them during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, the term backwardness does not in any sense apply to them then. Rather, it was the newly arrived Europeans in India who felt that the Indians applied such an appellation to them (the Europeans) for their manners and greed which were considered barbaric and uncouth, about the color of their skin which was thought to be diseased, or even the system of dowry which is said to have obtained in eighteenth century England, but to have been looked askance in eighteenth century India.[2] By the end of the eighteenth century when large parts of India had effectively been conquered and subdued the tide obviously changed and instead the term "backwardness" or images of similar nature began to be deliberately and extensively applied to Indian society.

[2]What Europeans thought of India and their impressions of what Indians felt about the European manners, skin, customs, etc., is described in great detail in European writings of the period 1500-1750 and most of it also appeared in English in the late sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries especially in the compilations of Hakluyt and also of Churchill. That the European white skin and odour were not much liked by Indians even comes through the 1857-58 record of the Mutiny. That the custom of dowry is looked down upon is frequently mentioned in eighteenth century writings including the Universal History, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and a 1753 MSS in the Bodleian, Oxford.

IV

In a long running debate in the British House of Commons in the summer of 1813 a great Englishman, Mr. William Wilberforce, considered as the Father of Victorian England by many, termed the condition of the people of India as 'wretched' and said that the Indians were sunk in deep ignorance.[3] Similar sentiments were expressed by another Englishman, Mr. James Mill, but with much more elaboration and in a more literary language in a multi-volume History of British India which he published in 1817. According to Mr. Mill, "In truth, the Hindu like the eunuch, excels in the quality of a slave", was "dissembling, treacherous, mendacious to an excess which surpasses even the usual measure of uncultivated society," was "cowardly and unfeeling", and was "in the physical sense, disgustingly unclean in their persons and houses."[4] It may be mentioned that Mr. Mill's view of the Muslim, or the Chinese was about the same. The imagery created by Mr. Wilberforce and Mr. Mill and followed by others, with modifications here and there, has more or less continued to this day. What has changed is merely the emphasis in accordance with the changing outlook of the West. The purpose now is not so much the saving of the soul through Christianity but instead a more total transformation of the Indian, as Karl Marx put it, by his becoming 'western'[5] or to use the current phrase 'modern'.

V

Around the same time however, i.e., the period 1800-25, yet other images of India emerge from writings and records which are less publicly available. A few of these may be indicated here.

The question of agricultural productivity and wages in India was discussed on the basis of available information in Britain in 1804. On comparing the Indian data with that relating to British agriculture it was found that the productivity in India was several times higher than in British agriculture. What surprised the British even more was the finding that the wages of the Indian agricultural labourer in real terms were substantially higher than of his counterpart in Britain. And it was then remarked that if they were that high at that time (i.e., around 1800 when Indian economy

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[3]Hansard: Debate on clause no. 13, of the India Charter Bill, titled "Propagation of Christianity in India", June 22 and July 1, 1813.

[4]James Mill. *History of India*, 1817, Vol. I, especially chapter on "Hindoos".

[5]Karl Marx in *New York Daily Tribune*, 8.8.1853.

was on a steep decline) how much higher such wages must have been before such decline began.[6]

Before arriving at a conscious policy regarding education in India the British carried out certain surveys of the surviving indigenous educational system. A detailed survey was carried out in 1822-25 in the Madras Presidency (i.e. the present Tamil Nadu, the major part of the present Andhra Pradesh, and some districts of the present Karnataka, Kerala and Orissa). The survey indicated that 11,575 schools and 1,094 colleges were still then in existence in the Presidency and that the number of students in them were 1,57,195 and 5,431 respectively. The more surprising information which this survey provided is with regard to the broader caste composition of the students in the schools. According to it, those belonging to the sudra-s and castes below them formed 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the total students in the Tamil speaking areas, 62 per cent in the Oriya areas, 54 per cent in the Malayalam speaking areas, and 35 per cent to 40 per cent in the Telugu speaking areas. The Governor of Madras further estimated that over 25 per cent of the boys of school-age were attending these schools and that a substantial proportion, and more so the girls, were receiving education at home. According to data from the city of Madras, 26,446 boys were receiving their education at home while the number of those attending schools was 5,532. The number of those engaged in college-level studies at home was similarly remarkable in Malabar; 1,594 as compared to a mere 75 in a college run by the family of the then impoverished Samudrin Raja. Further, again in the district of Malabar the number of Muslim girls attending school was surprisingly large, 1,122 girls as compared to 3,196 Muslim boys.[7] Incidentally, the number of Muslim girls attending school there 62 years later in 1884-85 was just 705. The population of Malabar had about doubled during this period.

If one looks deep enough, corresponding images of other aspects of Indian life and society emerge from similar British records of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. Those indicate not only a complex structure of science and technology (according to tests carried out by the

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[6]*Edinburgh Review*: July 1804, Dr. Tennant's Indian Recreations, pp. 323-324.

[7]TNSA: Board of Revenue Proceedings 1822-26; this and other material on the surviving early nineteenth century indigenous Indian education in also included in the present writer's book on the subject *The Beautiful Tree* (first published by Impex India, New Delhi. This book was republished by Other India Press, Goa and is available as *Dharampal Collected Writings Vol. III*).

British, the best steel in the world during this period was produced by relatively portable steel furnaces in India, and inoculation against small-pox was a widely-extended Indian practice)[8] but also the sophisticated organisational structure of Indian society. According to Mr. Alexander Read, later the originator of the Madras land revenue system, the only thing which seemed to distinguish the nobility from their servants in Hyderabad around 1780 was that the clothes of the former were more clean.[9]

An idea of Indian economy and the consumption pattern is provided by data from the district of Bellary dating back to 1806. It is concerned with an estimation of the total consumption of the people of the district and further indicated the detailed consumption pattern of the three categories of families in which the population was divided by the British authorities. The three categories are, first the more prosperous, second the families of medium means, and third the lowly. According to this estimate the consumption of the first article in the schedule, food grains, differed in quality and value between the families in the first category on the one hand and those in the second and third category on the other. But the quantity of food grains estimated to have been consumed in all three was the same, i.e., half *seer* of grain per person per day. The schedule included twenty-three other items including pulses, betel-nut, *ghee*, oil, tamarind, coconuts both fresh and dry, drugs and medicines, cloth, firewood and vegetables, and also betel leaves. As illustrative of the pattern of this consumption the number of betel leaves consumed per year in a family of six is given as 9,600 for the first category, 4,800 for those in the second category, and 3,600 for those in the third category. The consumption of *ghee* and oil was in the proportion of 3:1:1 approximately and of pulses 8:4:3. The total per capita per annum consumption was estimated at Rs. 17-3-4 for those belonging to the first category, Rs. 9-2-4 for those belonging to the second category and Rs. 7-7-0 for those in the third category.[10]

The pattern indicated in the above paragraph is of course very broad and in reality, a number of people may have had a much higher consumption pattern than the average of the first category. Similarly, perhaps a

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[8]Dharampal. *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century: Some Contemporary European Accounts*, Impex India. 1971.

[9]National Library of Scotland: MS 8326: James Stuart Papers: A description of life in Hyderabad, 1779.

[10]TNSA: BRP; Vol 2030: Pro: 13.7.1846, Collector Bellary to Board of Revenue, 18.6.1846, reporting on "estimates of consumption by Col. Munro in Fasli 1216."

much larger number consumed considerably less than the average in the third category. An indication of the extent of such differential between the really high and the really low is provided by some 1799 data again from the Karnataka area. After much inquiry about the incomes of the officers of state in Tipoo's domain the British came to the inference that the highest paid officer of Tipoo, the governor of the fort of Chitradurg, had a total salary of Rs. 100 per month during Tipoo's reign.[11] The wages of an ordinary labourer in this area during this period were about Rs. 4 per month. The new differential which came into being around this period is indicated by the salary of the British district collector (about Rs. 1,500 per month) and a member of the British Governor's Council receiving Rs. 6,000 to Rs. 8,000. The new disparities were not only related to British salaries. Where state policy so dictated similar decisions were taken with regard to Indians. An example is provided by the raising of the personal allowance of the Maharana of Udaipur. Till Udaipur came under British protection in 1818 the Maharana is said to have had an allowance of Rs. 1000 per month. Within a few months of British protection while various other expenses of the kingdom were either abolished or reduced, the allowance of the Maharana was raised to Rs. 1000 per day.[12]

A different picture also emerges of the Indian village as also of land rights. There are villages where the village community (perhaps the community of those who cultivated land and not necessarily of all the families in the village) seems to have been organised as a samudayam and, while the members of it had specific shares in the land of the village, the land which any of them cultivated was changed from time to time. Such a change in the district of Tanjore, where around 30 per cent of the villages were classed as samudayam in 1807, was stated to be based on the assumption that a certain alteration occurs in the fertility of all land from time to time which creates inequality amongst the members of the community and hence occasional redistribution was considered necessary.[13] Again, in Tanjore, in 1805, the number of *mirasdar-s* (i.e. those having permanent rights in land) was put at 62,048 of which over 42,000 belonged to the

[11]BM: Wellesley Papers: Papers of Mysore Commission, 1799.

[12]IOR: Drafts and Pre-coms 1829-30, Rajputana, Political and Foreign (withdrawn), p. 78, 141/m.

[13]T. Venkasami Row: Manual of the District of Tanjore in the Madras Presidency, 1833, Appendix C by H. J. Stokes; also reproduced in Dharampal. *The Madras Panchayat System: A General Assessment* pp. 217-227, Biblia Impex India, 1972.

sudra-s and castes below them.[14] The number of cultivators of the group termed *pariah* in the Baramahals (present Salem district) was estimated at 32,474 out of a total population of around 6,00,000.[15] The number of *mirasdar-s* actually listed by the Chingleput collector in the district in 1799 was put at 8,300 but the collector was of the view that the actual number of *mirasdar-s* there were about ten time more, i.e. around 80,000.[16] It is unnecessary to add that throughout India the rights of the actual cultivator were permanent and hereditary and, these began to be scrapped by the British from 1790 onwards firstly to enable them to realise a greatly enhanced land revenue and secondly because British ideas of ownership did not admit of any such cultivator rights even in Britain itself.[17]

The reality depicted above does not seem to have depended merely on some dead custom or mechanical routine. The surface appearance of this society is of lethargy, or exhaustion, of seeming sloth or to put it differently of tolerance and passivity. Yet there seem to have been deep feelings of justice and injustice, of righteousness and unrighteousness, of an undercurrent of pulsating activity beneath the surface passivity. A moral sense about things seem to have been deeply entrenched and whenever it seems to have been violated, there was much recourse to opposition, to protest, to *dharna*, to *traga*(or *tyaga*),[18] to peasant movements, to even what in modem usage may be called civil disobedience. There was prolonged protest against the imposition by British authority of a tax on houses in 1810-11 in the city of Varanasi. According to official reports the whole city had completely

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[14]TNSA: BPP; Vol 407; Pro: 20.5.1805, pp. 3488-89.

[15]Baramahal Records: Vol 3, p. vii (printed volumes).

[16]House of Commons Papers: 1812, Vol 7, paragraph 347 of L. Place's report on the Jaghire.

[17]Ibid. House of Commons Committee on the redefinition of land rights in India; also discussion on the point in Bengal Board of Revenue, 1790, 1792, in IOR: P/52/23, pp. 370-81; P/52/477, pp. 601-18.

[18]The practice of dying as a protest against an injustice, or breach of faith by authority, individuals, etc., seems to have been extensively resorted to in eighteenth and early nineteenth century India. Usually, recourse to such attempts at dying was undertaken by persons who were considered more sacred like the *Brahmins* in the Varanasi region, or the Bhats in Gujarat and Saurashtra, on behalf of the aggrieved. But dying is also resorted to by individuals and families who felt morally violated by specific acts of authority. The practice was equated with murder through enactment of statutes by the British even before 1800. The various such incidents reported in British records seem to indicate that the practice was based and sustained as a defence of what the people of India then, or sections of them, considered a moral order, something perhaps akin to what in current usage is termed as 'moral economy'.

stopped work for days together creating a situation that not even the dead could be cremated and had, therefore, to be cast in the Ganga without the performance of customary rites. According to the Varanasi collector, over 20,000 persons had been continually sitting in dharna, while another estimate placed the number of people collected between Secrole and the city at more than 2,00,000.[19]

VI

The image presented above and the data from which they are derived were not merely a matter of official files, however. Most of such information was current knowledge amongst the well informed on Indian affairs at the time of the House of Commons debate in 1813. Many of the members of the British Commons in fact gave many similar facts and were of the view that the people of India and Indian society, in spite of the turmoil and disorganisation it was passing through, instead of needing British pity were still rather to be envied for their enlightened manners, their tolerance, their social cohesiveness, their industry, and relative prosperity.

The debate however was not centred on such matters, and the social liveliness of Indian society was, in fact, an indication of its depravity. The debate was concerned with the saving of the soul of the Indian people and it was axiomatic for Mr. William Wilberforce and his great following that the people of India must be 'wretched', 'depraved' and sunk in deep ignorance till they could become Christians. For, as Mr. Wilberforce said that, they knew that the people of Greece and Rome had led wretched, depraved and ignorant lives till they got converted to Christianity and therefore it was impossible to believe that the people of India could be happy, enlightened, etc. in their unchristian state.[20]

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[19]Dharampal: *Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition: With Some Early Nineteenth Century Documents*, 1971, for a detailed account of this movement in Varanasi and other towns.

[20]Hansard: June 22 & July 1,1813 debate on "Propagation of Christianity in India". This debate which is published in over 110 columns of Hansard is perhaps the most historic debate which took place in the British House of Commons on the subject of the Indian people during the two centuries of India's formal connection with Britain. Also, contrary to most other discussions on India when it is said that there was hardly ever a quorum when such discussions took place this particular debate seems to have been very well attended and at the end of it was passed by a majority of 22, with 54 voting for the "propagation of Christianity in India" (as Hansard himself titled it) and 32 against it.

It is a wholly false impression that the early nineteenth century British mind was in any sense concerned with economic or social backwardness and that its usage of the terms 'ignorance' or 'wretchedness' pertain to a socio-economic context. Its concern at that period whether at home or in its expanding empire was wholly different. What obtained in early nineteenth century Britain were a very well defined and centuries old hierarchical structure,[21] a rigorous legal system which still treated 200 offences (including the stealing of goods worth five shillings and above)[22] as deserving of capital punishment, an administra – tive and military structure admission to which was based on birth, patronage and purchase,[23] and army punishments of 400 to 500 lashes and at times going up to 2,000 lashes for certain offenders.[24] To such a mind the liveliness of ordinary Indian society, its relatively cohesive social structure, its educational institutions, admission to which did not depend on wealth, its joint ownership of land and the security of its peasants rights, or the means through which it was accustomed to enforce its moral disapprobation of what it considered unjust were not points in its favour but elements which indicated its depravity and laxity.

The whole of this debate, as well as James Mill's characterisation of the Indians (and perhaps a few other similar documents) need to be seriously read and reflected upon in India today to give a better comprehension of the assumption on which current understanding of Indian society is largely founded.

[21]A detailed hierarchical division of British society was given by Colquohon in 1812. A similar earlier estimate was for the year 1688 by Gregory King. According to King 5,11,586 families divided into 21 hierarchical categories were responsible for an increase of Pound Sterling 24,47,100 per annum. On the other hand 8,49,000 families consisting of four categories were responsible for a decrease of Pound Sterling 6,22,000. These latter families consisted of 50,000 common seamen, 3,64,000 labouring people and out-servants, 4,00,000 cottagers and paupers, and 35,000 common soldiers.

[22]House of Commons Papers: 1819, Vol 8, Report dated 8.7.1819 of the Select Committee appointed to consider... the Criminal Laws. The committee recommended modifications in certain statutes, reducing the punishment from capital to 14-year hard labour or transportation for life.

[23]The official purchase price of all military commissions, from adjutant to Lt. Colonel was provided by British state regulation till around 1860. A return of the House of Commons (1857-11, Vol 18, pp 318-9) gives the purchase price of these commissions from 1719-20 to 1821. The highest for a Colonel of Regiments of Horse in 1719-20 was Pound Sterling 7,500 to 9,000; of the Adjutant, in the same regiment, Pound Sterling 200.

[24]There is a large literature on the variety of punishments imposed by British law during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from hanging, burning, chopping of some limb, pillory, to whipping, etc. Whipping was fairly common in Britain both in the army and as a judicial punishment till around 1850. The whips used were of several kinds.

VII

Economic and social backwardness as separate compared to what are termed as primitive ways and customs (which usually are western ways of describing other cultures) may be taken as a post-1800 phenomenon in India. It seems to have been caused firstly, by a colossal disorganisation of the Indian body-politic, secondly, by the centralisation of all authority and resources by the British system. The result was that for the next hundred years more such authority and the ever increasing proportions of the resources it began to command was applied (i) to the purposes of further conquest, including the conquest of areas up to the China seas and St. Helena near the Atlantic coast of Africa, and virtual military rule in the conquered areas,[25] (ii) the erection and maintenance of the new metropolises, other centres of European population, and the military cantonments, and (iii) the export of the maximum possible Indian revenues, under the name of a variety of demands, out of India and for the larger purposes of the British economy. Lastly, when disorganisation, impoverishment, subjugation had gone far enough and could not go any further without having adverse effects on the total revenue receipts, the whole of Indian society was placedunder a sort of freeze and it then became the task of scholarship to establish that such disorganisation, etc., had been endemic to Indian culture. The view that the Indians have always been a subjugated people and that wretchedness and impoverishment is nothing new to them, is generally subscribed to even today.

The above inferences may seem rather too harsh on British rule and perhaps even far-fetched. Perhaps two British statements, the first relating to 1600 Ireland on how best it could be entirely subdued and brought under English obedience, and the second pertaining to 1800 southern India again dealing with the problem of entirely subduing it, etc., may be of some relevance in this respect. The first by Sir John Davies, English attorney general of Ireland had the following to suggest as a more effective policy for Ireland.

> "The defects which hindered the Perfection of the Conquest of Ireland, were of two kinds, and consisted: first, in the faint prosecution of the War, and next, in the looseness of the civil

[25]According to a 1858 Memoranda by John Stuart Mill, from 1760 onwards the conquest, subjugation and administration of India had been wholly paid out of Indian revenues and not a penny for this was spent from Britain.

> Government. For, the husbandman must first break the land, before it be made capable of good seed; and when it is thoroughly broken and manured, if he do not forthwith cast good seed into it, it will grow wild again, and bear nothing but weeds. So, a barbarous country must be first broken by a War, before it will be capable of good Government; and when it is fully subdued and conquered, if it be not well planted and governed after the Conquest, it will left-soonest return to the former Barbarism."[26]

The second about India by Mr. Henry Dundas, President of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India, was sent in a dispatch to the Government of the Madras Presidency on 11 February 1801. Advising against a permanent settlement (of revenue, legal arrangements, etc.) it stated:

> "There is a material difference betwixt the state of the several of the provinces in the Carnatic and those of Bengal, where the measure of the permanent settlement was first taken into consideration. The Bengal provinces were infinitely farther advanced in the habits of order and subordination to Government than most places in the Carnatic... They (i.e., the Carnatic) are not so ripe for the reception of those benefits and blessings intended for them... Any attempt to introduce a regular system of order... would be idle and nugatory, till once their minds to a certain extent were prepared to feel the importance of the benefits, they were about to receive... This can never effectually be done, till you have suppressed that spirit of rebellion and insubordination, which is so conspicuous in many parts of the Northern Circars... The countries to which this observation applies must be brought to such a state of subjection as to acknowledge and submit to this principle. As they must be indebted to our beneficence and wisdom for every advantage they are to receive, so in like manner they must feel solely indebted to our protection for the continuance and enjoyment of them. We hold these truths to be so incontrovertible..."[27]

VIII

The above would suggest that what is more commonly conveyed by the term backwardness today (like backward castes, classes, etc.) can perhaps

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[26] *A History of the True Causes, Why Ireland was Never Entirely Subdued...*, 1613.
[27] IOR: Draft Dispatches; Revenue Dispatch to Madras, 11.2.1801.

more accurately be described as depletion and deprivation in matters of social expression, political initiative, and material and fiscal resources. To these may be added the effects of about two centuries of impoverishment. Basically, the solution lies in the reversal of the process which brought about such conditions. To an extent a reversal did begin to happen especially at the psychological and conceptual levels under the leadership of Gandhiji. His concept of swadeshi, in fact, dealt effectively even with the ethnocentric aspect of the term backwardness. According to Gandhiji:

> "Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. Thus, as for religion, in order to satisfy the requirements of the definition, I must restrict myself to my ancestral religion. That is the use of my immediate religious surroundings. If I find it defective, I should serve it by purging it of its defects. In the domain of politics, I should make use of the indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects. In that of economics, I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve these industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting." [28]

But evidently the reversal did not get far. The alien moorings and structuring of the Indian political-administrative system as well as other world forces, if not wholly hostile to such a reversal are in any case not attracted to it. To them what happened to India during British rule while it may have been regrettable, represents an irreversible process of history.

If what has happened in the West in the past 1,000 years has universal validity and all cultures and civilisations must pass through such a process as is at least apparently indicated by the history of the past century then what India has to do is already charted out. In fact, that is what has been taking place in India during the last three decades, but because of the memories and values of the Gandhian era, in a somewhat subdued manner. If India were convinced of such inevitability, the best course will be to reduce this interregnum and to accelerate the process of the atomisation of Indian society not only to bring the millennium sooner but also to reduce current misery, at least its duration. But if the former has no such validity and if one held to the belief that cultures and civilizations can renew themselves

[28]CWMG, Vol 13, p.219, Speech at missionary conference at Madras, 14.2.1916. Incidentally, this speech was just eight days after Gandhiji's historic speech at the BHU.

only through ways which have their source in their own psyche and the concepts which shape their societies, then India and areas like it, have to make great spiritual and intellectual effort to come into their own. In such an attempt, Gandhiji's vision and skill, and the talent and priorities of the Indian mind become crucial. One has then indeed to fall on what as a blanket term may be called 'indigenous resources' (the resources of the mind, the practical traditional wisdom, as well as the physical and material things) and demolish what has to be demolished, save what could be saved, and restructure on such foundations with the help of such resources. It is not necessary that all experience of others in the achievement of similar tasks has to be shunned. When properly analysed and digested such experience may indeed be of considerable value particularly in avoiding some of the inevitable pitfalls. Such renewal will require a considerable redistribution of the capital resources and wealth within India i.e., a movement of resources and incomes from the metropolises to the areas where such resources had originally arisen. Such transfers may also have to happen similarly on an international level. But such transfers if they happen will be in the nature of reparations[29] rather than as charity and aid and will thus have

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[29]Reparations are ordinarily paid by the defeated (or in legal disputes by those against whom a judgement has gone) to the victors, partly, as compensation for any damage they may have done to the latter, but, largely, as a lesson for having challenged or stood up to the eventual victors. But, in perhaps, a much older sense, and especially if one subscribed to the idea of an international moral order or believed in the current idea of a world fraternity, or of universality two things become imperative to bring some lasting balance to relationships in the world. The first is, that the identity and cultural distinctness (and all their socio-political expressions) of all people are taken to be inviolate and the world order is so arranged that all cultures and ways of life can coexist without open or covert violence. The second is that, especially in the past few centuries, the extent of plunder, deprivation of resources of a large part of the world for the benefits of the powerful has been unimaginable. As a consequence, the societies of the plundered and deprived, in instances where they have physically survived such calamity (as is well-known many did not,) had further been deliberately reduced to a state of stagnation. This stagnation and disorganisation not only caused them untold misery during the period of subjugation but has also left them with a multiplicity of problems practically in every sphere. Left wholly to themselves such societies in due time could undoubtedly through their own devices and efforts again restore themselves to health and come into their own. But as the possibility of isolating themselves from today's world seems impossible, the other alternative is that the prosperous parts of the world today (not excluding the prosperous 'enclaves' within these societies themselves) begin to feel a real sense of repentance for the havoc which had been created and which exists even today and on their own realise that a major redistribution of the resources of the world (not just what is advocated today by the Brandt Commission and the like which is mere eye wash) is now urgently called for.

a different psychological impact. The present charity and aid as is now well realised (whether it is through governments or at voluntary levels) in the long run merely erodes and further shatters the societies of the aided.

Abbreviations used:

BM:	British Museum
BRP:	Board of Revenue Proceedings
IOR:	India Office Records
TNSA:	Tamil Nadu State Archives
CWMG:	Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi

Such a redistribution is even imperative for the sake of relative international peace for it must be admitted that if such bouts of plunder and expropriation are not to continue forever (whether resorted to by one area of the world or another) this process of plunder and deprivation must sometime be reversed consciously and deliberately. Similar repentance undoubtedly has to be felt and appropriately acted upon by the privileged in their own greatly deprived societies.

5

Productivity of Indian Agriculture in Historical Perspective

[Presented at an International Symposium on Natural Resources Management for Sustainable Agriculture at India International Centre, New Delhi, 1990]

Though I know little about agronomy or agricultural technology I feel much honoured for the invitation which has been extended to me by this international symposium on Natural Resource Management for Sustainable Agriculture. As a lay historian of India, as India was about 200 years ago, I, however, have great interest in the social, economic and cultural life of India around that period and the way it compared to such aspects of life in other countries, especially the fast expanding and conquering countries of western Europe.

Some twenty years ago during my search for material on India I had come across substantial and specific material relating to various aspects of the then Indian technology and economy, including Indian agriculture. Following that early search, I, along with some friends, have in the last few years been looking at the records of a survey of about 2,000 villages in the district of Chingleput adjoining Madras city in Tamil Nadu. The survey was carried out around 1770 by a British engineer, Thomas Barnard, on the instructions of his superiors. Barnard collected detailed data about the area soon after the area around Madras came under direct British control. We are still processing the data of this seven-year survey. But a quick analysis of the agricultural produce from about 800 villages gives results that seem striking in the context of Indian agriculture as we know it for the last 50-100 years.

The records of production that we are dealing with relate to five years, 1762-66. From our analysis the average productivity of the area over these five years turns out to be about 36 quintals per hectare of paddy and about 16 quintals per hectare of dry grains. These averages are for an area extending to about 34 thousand hectares of irrigated paddy and about 14 thou-

sand hectares of unirrigated grains. The total production from the area amounts to an average of 12 lakh quintals of paddy and about 2 lakh quintals of coarse grains per year. The total number of households of both cultivators and non-cultivators in this area is around 26,000. This means that the annual productivity of food grains per household then was in the range of 57 quintals.

Out of the 800 villages under consideration there are 130 villages where irrigated lands show average yields of more than 50 quintals per hectare. Of these 130, there are many that produce more than 100 quintals of paddy per hectare of cultivated land. For e.g., the village Kalakattur produces about 1,500 tons of paddy on 120 hectares of irrigated cultivation, Chinnumbedu produces about 4,700 tons on 435 hectares of irrigated paddy, Karasangal 885 tons on 83 hectares and Somangalam 750 tons on 73 hectares. There are many more villages with smaller amounts of irrigated land and having this level of productivity. These 130 villages of relatively high productivity at our present computation produce about half of the total food grains of the area on about one-fifth of the irrigated land. Average productivity of these 130 villages with about 7,000 hectares of cultivated paddy land turns out to be as high as 82 quintals per hectare. Incidentally, about half the production of these 130 villages comes from just 18 villages that have cultivated paddy lands of more than a hundred hectares each.

Average productivity of about 36 quintals per hectare of paddy over a large area covering 800 villages and average productivity of 82 quintals per hectare from the relatively more productive lands seem rather high. Incidentally, the land of Chingleput is of no more than moderate fertility in the Indian context and is not comparable to the fertile lands of Thanjavur district, or the Godavari area. Other accounts of pre-British Indian agriculture have reported equally high figures for the productivity of cultivated lands in various parts of India. The Ain-i-Akbari records wheat productivity from middling lands which compares well with the highest productivity obtained in post-Green Revolution Indian agriculture. The Cambridge Economic History of India on the basis of the inscriptions of the Chola period (Tenth to Thirteenth Century A.D.) estimates that average produce from lands of various kinds in South Arcot district of Tamil Nadu may have been around 33 quintals per hectare, and some of the best lands in the relatively infertile Ramnad districts may even have been producing 66 quintals per hectare of paddy. For early nineteenth century

Allahabad, an observer reports productivity of about 40 quintals of wheat per hectare. Francis Buchanan travelling in southern as well as eastern India around 1800 estimates rice productivity of about 35 quintals per hectare from Coimbatore, and somewhat lower productivity for wheat from the Patna-Gaya area. John Hodgson, a senior member of the Madras Presidency Board of Revenue, in 1807 estimated productivity of almost 60 quintals of paddy per hectare for the relatively better lands in Coimbatore. An early discussion on Indian agricultural productivity (about three times compared to that of England) was published in the *Edinburgh Review* around 1804. The Edinburgh Review also then commented that the wages of the Indian agricultural labourer were also much more than his British counterpart. The productivity figures we have obtained for the 800 villages of Chingleput amply confirm the above. Further, the Chingleput data relates to a much more extensive area and cannot possibly be treated as a statistical accident or as the exaggerated impression of an isolated observer.

How does one explain the spectacular yields obtained by the Indian peasant? The explanation usually offered is that since the pressure of population on land was rather low, only the most fertile lands were brought under cultivation. This may be partly true. But this fact must have been equally applicable all over the world. Yet most observers seem to agree that yields obtained in India in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century seem higher than the yields obtained in England in the last decades of the nineteenth century, after the discovery of the role of nitrogen in plant growth, and consequent agricultural revolution. The English farmers after about 1840 had started to use heavy doses of fertilisers, initially potash from mines of Germany, basic slag from the fast-growing British steel works, and during 1840-1860 even importing millions of tons of *guano* (bird droppings) from distant Peru, in South America, where heaps of *guano* had accumulated over centuries. This fertilisation was subsequently followed by artificial fertilisers.

The high yields of the Indian peasants, therefore, could not have been the result of merely the fortuitous fertility of the lands they chose to cultivate. The details of the technology that made this productivity possible need to be studied carefully. Many eighteenth century western observers have often referred to the sophistication of the then Indian agricultural technology. The aspects which have been specially noted are the variety of seeds available to the Indian peasant, the sophistication and simplicity of his tools, and the extreme care and labour he expended in tending to his fields and crops.

According to recent historical findings, 41 different crops were being cultivated annually in the localities of the province of Agra. The number of crops cultivated in other areas of northern India was equally large. For the south of India, Alexander Walker (he was in Malabar and Gujarat from 1780-1810) notes that in Malabar alone upwards of fifty kinds of rice was cultivated.[1] This variety of seeds and crops that the Indian peasant possessed and his ability to vary these according to the needs of the soil and the season, seems to set him apart from most other peasants or cultivators of the world whose knowledge was limited to far fewer crops.

Alexander Walker also notes the variety of agricultural implements that the Indian peasants employed. According to him they had different kinds of plough, "both drills and common [plough], adapted to different sorts of seed and soil". The observation of a drill plough working in the fields of southern India in 1795 in fact came as a shock to Captain Thomas Halcott who had imagined this type of plough to be then a recent European invention. He was so impressed by these and felt that they were far superior to the drills then in use in England that he sent these various drills, etc., to the semi-official Board of Agriculture in London.

The care that the Indian peasant bestowed upon his crops is legendary. Alexander Walker passing through Gujarat was struck by the neatness of the fields there and remarked that, "The whole world does not produce finer and more beautifully cultivated fields than those in Guzerat." Referring to the careful habits of the Indian peasants he remarked that, "I have seen from Cape Comorin to the Gulf of Kutch details of the most laborious cultivation, of the collection of manure, of grains sown for fodder, of grains sown promiscuously for the same purpose, of an attention to the change of seed, of fallows and rotation of crops."

It is perhaps this careful attention to every aspect of his fields and crops that provided the Indian peasant access to technologies that made such high productivity possible. It must have been such attention and care that helped the Malabar peasant discover the technology of rice propagation by cuttings as noted down by Alexander Walker. However, a major component of these technologies was perhaps the way the land in each area was utilised. In the area of the 800 villages of Chingleput that we have talked

[1]For more details, see the historical documents in Dharampal, *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Centry : Some Contemporary European Accounts*, Biblia I mpex, New Delhi, 1971, especially Chapter XII & XIII (reprinted in Dharampal, *Collected Writings*, Other India Press, Goa, Vol. I)

about, an area equal to half of the total cultivated area was under water. The total cultivated area in these villages is about 54,000 hectares. The area covered under various sources of irrigation amounted to 26,000 hectares. Another 18,000 hectares was under forest. This high proportion of greenery and water perhaps creates conditions where high productivity becomes more easily possible.

Increasing the productivity of Indian agriculture is one of the major problems we have been trying to tackle since 1947. For this purpose we have extensively borrowed technologies from elsewhere. In a situation where we have been habitually and mechanically looking outwards for all new ideas in every sphere of life nothing different could perhaps have been expected in the field of agriculture. But the technologies we have imported, do not seem to be capable of solving the food problem of India. It is widely said that these technologies are proving ruinous for our land. It seems that we are actually consuming the fertility of our lands in order to obtain productivity of the order of 50-60 quintals a year on some of the best lands in India. Such technologies may have been appropriate for countries like the USA or the USSR or Australia, South Africa, etc. that have vast uninhabited tracts of land which could be consumed for immediate production and then left to nature to recuperate. But thought needs to be given whether such practices and technologies are right for India. India is a compact, geographical entity. All areas of it are densely populated. We cannot possibly afford to follow technologies that ruin our cultivable land in 30, 40 or even in 100 years.

Now that we are relatively more experienced about modern science, technology, and western institutions, and also have time to reflect and do serious thinking, which perhaps we did not have in the 1950s, we need to seriously look at the way Indian peasants of about 200 years ago managed to produce up to 10 tons on a hectare of land without following the ruinous practices of today. We have so far introduced modern practices mostly in the irrigated areas of the country. The rain-fed agriculture of India is still relatively untouched. Before we decide to devise newer policies for rain-fed agriculture, it is imperative to understand the Indian ways of practising relatively high productivity agriculture in rain-fed lands.

It may be said that the best of the Indian practices shall prove inadequate to feed the large population of today, and that following modern practices is an absolute necessity if we are to continue supporting the present day population.

If this is true, and the truth of it has to be seriously investigated, then we shall have to think out several short-term and long-term strategies, not only in the mix of practices, technologies, which give us the agricultural production that we require and which the soil of India can continue to produce without doing irreversible damage to itself, but also as regards the future of population growth in India. Despite the great popular Indian resurgence of the late nineteenth and the first half of the present century, little worthwhile thought has yet been given to such questions. Far too long India has been directed and planned by people whose contact with the Indian reality has been minimal and who have so far largely functioned on such residual knowledge and methodology which we inherited from 150 years of British dominance, and that which we have since been allowed to borrow from Europe and USA. The time should have now arrived when, before we borrow any specific knowledge, technology etc. from other lands, we first locate and harness our own intellectual, and spiritual resources to provide us the basis for a more desirable future. If such effort implies that conscious steps have to be taken, say over two generations, to see that we arrive at a more or less stable population or even a reduced population of say about 50 crores by the year 2050 A.D. such effort shall have to be made on the foundations of our own spiritual and intellectual strength.

What I am suggesting above is not because of any civilisational revulsion to learning from the rest of the world. All knowledge in the world is in a way a mix of the indigenous and the alien. Transfer of technology has been going on in the world, at varied paces, from the beginning of history. Much of what the West has structured in the past 600-700 years, is to a substantial extent, based on such transfer. The British even borrowed quite a few things, in fields as apart as the manufacture of high-grade steel and the practice of plastic surgery from late eighteenth century India. But it is only such borrowings, that after the transfer can get transplanted and strike root, which have led to growth and the Internalisation of what had been borrowed. In all such cases, the new knowledge was married to the need with discrimination and if it worked it was allowed to modify itself according to the priorities and preferences of the borrower.

If we are seriously concerned with natural resource management for sustainable Indian agriculture, we shall have to reverse the ongoing process and begin to learn from our own people and our environment.

Production and Productivity in 800 Villages of Chingleput, 1762-1765

	Total Sample	Villages with Paddy Productivity (>50quintals/hectare)	Villages with Paddy Productivity (>100quintals/hectare)
Number of Villages	800	130	18
Total Households	25,620	6,698	2,455
Total Land (in hectares)	1,51,821	26,424	9,415
Land under Forest(in hectares)	15,800	2,201	398
Land under Irrigation Sources (in hectares)	23,392	4,967	1,798
Irrigated Cultivation (in hectares)	34,136	7,203	3,745
Dry Cultivation (in hectares)	13,857	2,364	1,006
Paddy Production(Av. of 5 years 1762-65 in quintals)	12,34,329	5,91,107	3,26,114
Production of Dry Grains(Av. of 5 years 1762-65 in quintals)	2,17,890	71,975	22,429
Productivity of Paddy (in quintals/hectare)	36.16	82.06	87.08
Productivity of Dry Grains (in quintals/hectares)	15.72	25.13	22.30
Mean Productivity of the Area (in quintals/hectares)	30.26	65.87	73.36
Production per household (in quintals)	56.68	99.00	141.97

6

The Census of India 1881-1931

[Written in Bangalore, August 1993]

It seems that even before they arrived in India and began to build exclusive settlements or factories[1] the British were given to surveys of the places they settled in, to the carrying of censuses within them, and to the surveying and estimating of the wealth and military potential of the regions in which these settlements or factories were established. Thus the idea of the survey, census, etc. initiated by the British in India seem to go back to around 1600 A.D. and by around 1750 when the British began to exercise military and political power over substantial regions of India such surveys had become quite frequent and common.

Two of the major detailed post-1750 surveys were of the district of Chengalpattu near Madras and of the *bazee* and *cakran zameen*[2] of the major part of Bengal and Bihar. The survey in Chengalpattu, conducted during 1767-1774, covered all the more than 2,000 localities of the district, and took detailed account of all the land, water sources, houses, professions or community of the people who inhabited each and every house, the agricultural production, woods, cattle, sheep, goats, etc., of each and every locality, The Bengal survey of *bazee* and *cakran zameen*,carried out in the 1770s, was equally, perhaps even more, detailed. By around 1800 such surveys seem to have been carried out in most districts of British conquered India and seemingly continued from one year to another for large part of the nineteenth century.

[1] Sort of fortifications with building for storage etc. and not really places which were used for any production of commodities.

[2]Lands the tax of which had traditionally and historically been allocated to religious, cultural and charitable functions, and also towards the remunerations of local establishments including those of the police and militia systems.

In a way the survey was integral to conquest, and in time became a more effective tool of domination and control, and its results and conclusions were of major assistance in the making of state policy. However, the idea of survey did not originate in India but was integral to British functioning in Britain itself. In time surveys led to the enumeration of each and every human being, besides the counting and surveying of land, houses, horses, cattle, sheep, machinery, tools, etc. The first Census was taken in Great Britain in 1801 and then at 10 yearly intervals thereafter till today.

The British began to think of an India-wide census around 1850, but, the first such census could only be held on February 17,1881 under the direction of a Census Commissioner at Calcutta and under the supervision of Census Superintendents in each of the provinces, presidencies, and Indian princely states. This first census put the land area of India at 13,82,624 square miles and the population at 25,38,91,823. The textual part of the report of the all-India Census was divided into chapters and it may be useful to mention them at this point.

I. (paras 1-29)	Area and Density	pp 1-15
II. (paras 30-76)	Religion of the People	pp 16-50
III. (paras 77-115)	Proportion of the Sexes	pp 51-83
IV. (paras 116-153)	Civil condition of the People [unmarried, married, widowed]	pp 84-113
V. (paras 154-171)	Ages of the population	pp 114-141
VI. (paras 172-240)	Rates of Mortality and duration of life	pp 142-193
VII. (paras 241-358)	Languages	pp 194-216
VIII. (paras 359-385)	Statistics of Birth Place	pp 217-226
IX. (paras 386-404)	Statistics of Instruction	pp 227-254
X. (paras 405-433)	The Insane, Blind, Deaf, Mutes and Lepers	pp 255-270
XI. (paras 434-448)	Urban and Rural Population	pp 271-346
XII. (paras 449-691)	Caste Statistics	pp 277-346
XIII. (paras 692-773)	Occupations of the People	pp 347-452
XIV. (paras 774-789)	Movement of the Population	pp 453-466
XV. (paras 790-805)	Concluding Remarks	pp 467-473

The first volume of the textual report of the 1881 census was accompanied by three other volumes of tabulated data relating to the above text and design. The four volumes together covered around 1,200 folio pages. This pattern was followed by the provinces, presidencies, etc. The pattern set up in 1881 was followed, with minor additions, supplementing, varying etc., till the seventh census in 1941. The census of 1941 was a partial census as the British and their government in India were then engaged in a major European war. The published material therefore was much less voluminous. In all, the report of these seven censuses, 1881-1941, add up to around 1,20,000 folio pages, and have for some time been available on 3,693 microfiche, produced in Switzerland, from the printed copies kept in the India Office Library, London. India, the subject of the census does not seem to possess a complete printed set, either for the whole of India or a province of it.

What is available in the London India Office Library, and that which has been put on microfiche, is perhaps also only around half of what was printed for public or official use. Though it seems to include all the reports pertaining to the provincial and all-India levels, it does not include detailed material pertaining to the villages and towns, and perhaps some pertaining to talukas and districts which is stated to have been printed at least in the earlier census. Individual reports prepared by some of the smaller Indian princely states also do not seem to be included in the set on microfiche.

The more voluminous of the available reports are for the census of 1891 (on 722 microfiche), 1901 (on 751 microfiche) and that of 1931 (on 588 microfiche). Amongst them all the report on the Mysore census of 1891 (102 microfiche) seems to be the longest.

II

Though each census begins with a description of land area and topography of province and region to which it pertains, and in the later decades, especially in 1921 and 1931 to the decay of indigenous Indian industries, etc., or to the extent of the spread of the modern power driven industry, or even census of cattle, the main concern of each census was to gather information on the number of people inhabiting India and the racial, cultural and social characteristics of the people of India, as well as their economic divisions and activities. Till about 1911 there was major speculation and exploration about Indian religion and religious sects, and even more so about Indian social divisions described, listed, enumerated, and variously tabulat-

ed under the term "caste". The interest in caste seems to be highest around 1891 when the census, especially for Punjab, NWP and Oudh (the present Uttar Pradesh), the Madras Presidency and the state of Hyderabad came out with what were termed as Index of Castes. The Index for Punjab listed over one lakh names of what was termed as sub-castes, that of Uttar Pradesh 54,000, for Madras Presidency around 30,000 and for Hyderabad around 5,000. The number of sub-divisions amongst the over 40 lakh Muslims, Hindus and Sikh *Jat*-s of Punjab in 1891 were listed as above 11,000. For numerous other groups such sub-divisions ranged from 1,000 to around 5,000. In the Madras Presidency the *paraiyar*-s had around 350 subdivisions and the *palli* had around 365 sub-divisions. Some modification of the Punjab list was made in the census of 1911. But even this modification would have left Punjab with over 50,000 names of "castes". The Punjab *Jat*-s for instance, still retained 4,473 sub-divisions in the modified list of 1911.

The following table gives the number of sub-divisions of the 15 selected Punjab castes as given in 1911 Punjab census.

Sub-divisions of 15 selected castes in the Punjab

	1891	1911 (Revised)
1. Agarwal	703	286
2. Ahir	587	420
3. Awan	2,249	1,013
4. Biloch	1,551	1,060
5. Brahman	2,173	1,484
6. Chuhra	3,916	2,305
7. Fakir	1,022	927
8. Jat	11,161	4,473
9. Khatri	3,086	1,559
10. Lohar	3,057	1,868
11. Macchi	1,047	784
12. Musalli	(with Chuhra above)	581
13. Rajput	5,723	3,586
14. Sheikh	1,627	1,068
15. Sonar	1,576	1,494

It is probable that if all the provinces and presidencies and princely states had printed such indexes, the total number of such names may have ranged around 3 to 5 lakhs. Though there possibly were major errors in these indexes and listings, it seems that each household at the time of enumeration was defining itself by indicating its lineage and the name which it gave was that of the *kula*, of which the household was a part, and not the name of its *gotra*, or sub-caste or caste, as seemingly assumed by these indexes.

According to these reports the number of the major castes in any province, presidency, etc., was in the range of 30-50 and these accounted for around 75 per cent of the population of the province; or in provinces like Bengal, where the overwhelming majority of the Mussalmans, by stages began to be clubbed together as "Sheikh", they by themselves formed around 75 per cent of the Mussalman population. Besides these major or numerous castes, there were around 100 to 300 smaller groupings perhaps totalling around 25 per cent of the population, which quite possibly included amongst them large number of groups engaged in special crafts and professions. Additionally, most provinces had 100-300 other minor groupings, each numbering less than a few thousand and many only in hundreds.

III

Though caste seems to have fascinated and perplexed those who planned and directed the census, the ratio between males and females, in the Indian population seems to have interested the British more. The knowledge of prevalence of infanticide and exposure of very young children, in European antiquity and later in the European middle ages, seems to have directed the attention of the British officers in this direction. Moreover, their knowledge since about the mid-seventeenth century of the practice of *sati* in certain parts of India, and reports of the prevalence of female infanticide amongst certain groups of Rajputs in Gujarat and in certain districts of Uttar Pradesh, may have also aroused their interest in this area. From this, the belief arose that Indian society was given to female infanticide, or at least to neglect and maltreatment of its females.

The 1881 India-wide census enumerated the total number of males as 12,99,41,851 and of females as 12,39,49,970 in a total population of 25,38,91,821. The eastern (especially Bengal and Orissa) and southern India (most of Madras Presidency, Mysore, Travancore) had slightly a greater number of females, while the central, northern and especially the north-western areas (Punjab, Kashmir, NWP) had a varying excess of males.

While the South and the East had an excess of females to males similar to Germany, Netherlands, Spain, etc., the Central and Northern regions were more like Greece which had 51.7 males to 48.3 females. Amongst large areas only the Punjab showed a much higher male ratio of 54.25 males to 45.75 females.

The stress on this low female presence and investigation around it had been set on by the British much before the 1881 census. A census taken in 1872 in NWP had made a special study of it and produced a 600-page report on the sex ratio in the NWP. It may be indicative of British high concern that Mr. W.C. Plowden who had directed the 1872 NWP census, was made the first Census Commissioner for the 1881 Census. It may also be mentioned here that while in large parts of India there was a slight excess of females over males, and in most they were about equal, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, after such manifest British concern, there was a marked decline in the proportion of females in most parts of India. By the time the British were made to quit India, a further decline in the proportion of the female population (in comparison to its proportion before 1900) was of the order of 5 per cent.

IV

From one decade to another, the census came out with further elaboration of the older data as well as information on hitherto unrecorded aspects of Indian life. Much of such information perhaps was largely exotic in its nature as the details of the 18 and 9 *phana*-s into which most of the communities in the Mysore state were said to group themselves, or the detailed rituals of a large number of *brahmin* communities, or for that matter of the *Jat*-s and other communities of northern India, or that out of the total of 19,630 listed villages in Mysore 7,935 of which had the ending "Halli", 1,289 had the ending "Urn" and 1,770 ended with "Pura".

The early census especially have much discussion and comment on Indian religions, religious sects, castes, etc. A few comments from the Punjab census of 1881 may be reproduced here.

1. The effect of Hinduism upon the character of the followers:

> "(Hinduism) can hardly be said to have an effect upon the character of its followers, for it is itself the outcome and expression of that character... In fact the effect of Hinduism upon the character

of its followers is perhaps best described as being wholly negative. It troubles their souls with no problems of conduct or belief, it stirs them to no enthusiasm either political or religious, it seeks no proselytes, it preaches no persecution, it is content to live and let live. The characteristic of the Hindu is quiet, contented thrift. He tills his land, he feeds his *Brahman*, he lets his womenfolk worship their gods, and accompanies them to the yearly festival at the local shrines, and his chief ambition, is to build a brick house, and to waste more money than his neighbour at his daughter's wedding."

2. On Mussalmans (of Eastern Punjab):

"In the eastern portion of the Punjab the faith of Islam, in anything like its original purity, was till quite lately to be found only among the Saiyads, Pathans, Arabs and other Mussalmans of foreign origin, who are for the most part settled in towns. The so-called Mussalmans of the villages were Mussalmans in little but name. They practised circumcision, repeated the *Kalimah*, or mahomadan profession of faith, and worshipped the village deities. But after the Mutiny a great revival took place. Mahomadan priests travelled far and wide through the country preaching the true faith, and calling upon believers to abandon their idolatrous practices... But the villager of the East is still a very bad Mussalman... As Mr. Charming puts it, the Mussalman of the villages 'observes the feasts of both religions and the fasts of neither'."

3. The impure and outcaste tribes:

"I have said in the beginning of this chapter that the impure and outcaste races are not generally recognised by the higher castes as belonging to their religion, even though they may profess its tenets and observe its injunctions. These people include some 2,012,000 Hindus, 173,000 Sikhs, 492,000 Mussalman sand some hundreds of Buddhists... I am sorry to say that we are singularly ignorant of the practices and beliefs of these outcaste classes. Generally, it may be said that such of them as have not become Mussalmans, usually burn their dead and marry byphera, while most of them have *Brahmans* to attend them in their ceremonies, though these *Brahmans* have become impure by association with

their unclean clients and have been excluded from communion by their unpolluted brethren."

4. Effect of conversion upon caste:

"The Mussalman, Rajput, Gujar, or Jat is for all social, tribal, political and administrative purposes exactly as much a Rajput, Gujar, or Jat as his Hindu brother. His social customs are unaltered, his tribal restrictions are unrelaxed, his rules of marriage and inheritance unchanged; and almost the only difference is that he shaves his scalp lock, and the upper edge of his moustache, repeats the Mahomedan creed in a mosque and adds the Mussalman to the Hindu wedding ceremony.

As I have already shown in the chapter on religion, he even worships the same idols as before, or has only lately ceased to do so. (This is much less true of the middle classes of towns and cities. They have no reason to be particularly proud of their caste, while the superior education and more varied constitution of the urban population weakens the power of the tribal custom. In such cases the convert not infrequently takes the title of Sheikh though even here a change of caste name or conversion is probably the exception.)"

5. Impact of Islamic Conquest on Caste:

"Indeed it seems to me exceedingly probable that where the Mussalman invasion has not, as in the western Punjab, been so wholesale or the country of the invaders so near as to change bodily by force of example the whole tribal custom of the inhabitants, the Mahomedan conquest of northern India has tightened and strengthened rather than relaxed the bonds of caste; and it has done this by depriving the Hindu population of their natural leaders the *Rajput*-s, and throwing them wholly into the hands of the *Brahman*-s.

The full discussion of this question would require a far wider knowledge of Indian comparative sociology than I possess. But I will briefly indicate some considerations which appear to me to point to the probable truth of my suggestion... We know that, at least, in the earlier and middle stages of Hinduism, the contest between the Brahman and the *Rajput* for social leadership, of the people was prolonged and... (see Muir's Sanskrit Texts, Vol. I). The

Mahomedan invaders found in the *Rajput* princes political enemies whom it was their business to subdue and to divest of authority; but the power of the *brahmin* threatened no danger to their rule, and that they left unimpaired."

V

The information which comes through the Census relates to a large variety of Indian social, cultural and economic aspects. But the weightier of the information generally conveys a sense of unbelievable terror, horror and agony.

To the people about whom such information is given it must have been, at least in a localised, immediate experiential sense very familiar. They had to live through its reality perhaps for a century or more and yet survive it as a people. But its value as well as its horror consists in its being a consolidated account or indication of what they must have been through.

The Madras Census of 1891 mentions, "In Madras about 28 per cent of the children born, die before the completion of the first year of life, and one half of them are dead before they reach the age of nine in the case of males, and before they are fourteen in the case of females". And it proceeds to add, "In England the population is not reduced to one half until the 45th year for males and the 47th year for females." It can be taken that what was happening in Madras was more or less true for other parts of India too.

Another fact, equally horrifying, relates to the proportion of widows in the Indian population. The average India-wide figure for 1881 or 1891 which is given informs us that out of every 100 females (from the age 1 to the age of 60 and above) 20 were widows. The meaning is that in every average group of five females there were two unmarried girls, two married women and on the average one widow. In certain parts of India, and among certain groups, the proportion of widows amongst the total females went up to one-third (33 per cent) or more, while in many others, perhaps in the remaining about 60 per cent of the population it was below 15 per cent.

There are many other details of this kind. But even considering half the children dying by the age of 9 and 14 and one-fifth of the women living as widows implies a society not only of great sorrow but one which had been emaciated to the extreme. When and how such a situation was reached is a matter for deep extensive investigation. But it can perhaps safely be assumed that this phenomenon on this scale had started soon after

the British began conquering India. The conquest was accompanied by prolonged plunder, enforced emaciation of the people and by the neglect and exhaustion of India's land and other assets. The traditions and ways and beliefs of India may have introduced further complications in this enforced situation. The continual dying of the young would have led to not only wishing and awaiting the birth of yet another child but also to the tendency to have a larger number of children so that at least one or two of them would survive in a situation where at least half of them were not expected to survive at all. Further, it would have also led to a considerable lowering of the age of formal marriage especially amongst those who wished to class themselves as twice-born, as being married was equal to being auspicious? If one were to die soon after such a marriage it was perhaps thought the right thing that one had at least already nominally entered the married state.

Given such a death-toll, it is far more likely that the 100-150 years of active British intervention and conquest had halved the population of India by around 1880, or perhaps even a few decades earlier, as the black death had halved the population of major parts of Europe in the 14th and 15th century. If that is what, on investigation, is found to have happened, India around 1750 could have had a population of some 30 crores to 40 crores and not the 15 crores to 20 crores as assumed hitherto. It may also be worth considering that the notion of five persons constituting a household does not seem applicable to the eighteenth century and earlier Indian society. It is more likely, and the agricultural productivity data seems to support it, that the household in India was much larger and often included a few other persons besides the currently much celebrated nuclear family of husband and wife and two or three children.

VI

Along with conducting the census, various major policies for directing Indian society were being experimented and implemented at the ground level especially in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, amongst different strata of Indian society. In fact, the census was a major tool for gauging the impact of such policies and measuring their success. Before the first India-wide census in 1881, one or more census had been undertaken in every province, princely state, etc., during 1850 and 1875. Their results were conveyed in 1875 in a 64-page memorandum prepared in London for presentation to the British Parliament. The total pop-

ulation of India under British control, including the princely "Indian" India added up to 23,88,30,958. The share of Indian India in this total, for which not many details are given in the memorandum, was 4,82,67,910.

The memorandum had then termed 87,12,998 persons as outcastes in a total Hindu population of 14,91,30,185 and a total India-wide population of 19,03,63,048 for British India. This total included 4,08,82,537 Mussalmans (1,95,53,831 being in Bengal which included Bihar and Orissa). The Mussalmans were further grouped as Saiyads (7,90,984), Pathans (18,41,693), Moghuls (2,19,755), Sheikhs (47,00,320) and "unspecified" (3,26,74,800). It is to be noted that 30-35 years later the census of 1911 gave the number of Sheikhs in Bengal alone as 2,29,52,944 and the number of Sheikhs for India as 3,21,31,342. The memorandum of 1775 gave the number of Sheikhs in Bengal as 10,69,497.

Besides including the "outcastes" (87,12,998 more than half of whom were in Madras) the 14,91,30,185 Hindus included 1,77,16,825 persons under the category "Aboriginal tribes or semi-Hinduised Aborigines", 5,95,815 native Christians, 11,74,436 Sikhs, and 28,32,851 Buddhists and Jains. Of the latter number, 24,47,831 were Buddhists living in the then British Burma.

The number of those known as outcastes (or later as depressed, untouchable, in 1931 the exterior castes, and finally on being grouped together on various provincial schedules termed as the Scheduled castes) more or less got multiplied in the same way, as the category "Sheikh". The 1931 census commissioner, J.H. Button, termed them as Exterior Castes and made their total come to 5,02,50,347 in a total 1931 Hindu population of 23,86,22,602. Similarly those called "primitive tribes" in 1931 were enumerated as 2,46,13,848.

VII

British policy seems to have been quite active about the achievement of literacy in English, and perhaps the possible elimination of the mention of Sanskrit from the census schedules. While around a hundred world languages including Estonian, Japanese, Chinese, etc., were put on the census schedule and on the language returns, Sanskrit seems to have been clubbed in the category "other languages". From around 1891 data was being collected on literacy for a fairly large number of selected castes. The Punjab literacy table for 1891, running over 238 folio pages, was titled "showing by

caste, tribe and race, the literate population distinguishing those who know English from those who do not." In a total Punjab population of 2,51,30,127 the total number of literates was given as 7,99,177 males and 20,205 females. Those literate in English numbered 40,556 males and 4,887 females. Out of these, 21,849 males and 4,116 females were of English origin and a small number were from other European countries or were Eurasians. But by then 4,193 *Khatri*-s, 2,684 *Brahman*-s, 1,307 *Arora*-s, 1,149 *Bania*-s, 1,319 *Sheikh*-s, 763 *Kaith*-s, 736 *Rajput*-s, 653 *Jat*-s, 565 *Billoch*, 517 *Saiyad*-s, and 1,375 Native Christians had become literate in English. English literacy had also reached 139 *Sunar*-s, 80 Barbers, 80 *Lohar*-s, 157 *Takkhan*-s, 35 *Julaha*-s, 25 *Teli*-s and 99 *Jhinwar*-s. Amongst the 771 Indian females who had become literate in English, the largest number 589 was of native Christian females. There were also 28 *Khatri*, 19 *Sheikh*, 8 *Billoch*, 13 *Brahman*, 10 *Rajput*, 11 *Saiyad*, 2 *Kalal*, and 1 *Camar* female who had acquired English literacy in the Punjab by 1891.

There is continuous caste-wise data on literacy and literacy in English for all provinces, states, etc., till 1941. The data seem to suggest as if there was a planned linkage between general literacy and literacy in English and that the former was not to overly outpace the spread of English literacy. A detailed analysis of this data may indicate that by and large the ratio between total general literacy and literacy in English continued to be in the range of 10 to 1 and in some less westernised regions as 15 to 1. Persons in many castes undoubtedly lagged far behind in the acquiring of any literacy and especially English literacy. There were however groups like the *Brahman*-s, *Khatri*-s, *Kayastha*-s, and others amongst whom in certain cities and towns around half the males had become literate in English by 1931.

PART-2

Problems faced by India after the end of European Dominance

7

A Surfeit of Planning: Where are the People?

[Published in AVARD Newsletter, New Delhi, July-August 1960. This was also sent to all members of Indian Parliament. It also reached Dr. E.F. Schumacher in England. He used parts of it in a lecture delivered at Gokhale Institute of Economics and Politics, Pune, sometime in 1962-63.]

The draft of the Third Plan has recently been debated by the Lok Sabha. In spite of apprehensions expressed by members like Acharya Kriplani, Dr. Melkote and others, the discussion on the whole has been subdued. Not even the decision of the Swatantra Party to ask for a division, thus creating a history of sorts, caused much animation, the Government motion being adopted by 222 votes to 8.

The problem of present-day planning, however, raises many fundamental issues than could be settled by a single debate in one forum or another. If the repetition of one plan succeeding another every five years (or at some other periodicity) is not to become a ritual, the leaders of public opinion, in Parliament, other legislatures, or elsewhere, of whatever political or social persuasion, need to take some time off from their ever-mounting routine duties to take stock, to analyse, and to renew their links emotionally as well as physically with existent reality.

No doubt the country has had innumerable evaluations, surveys and other judgements of the various activities by expert teams and individuals, both from here and abroad. There has been plenty of criticism of this and that, a lot more recommendations and advice and still more actual data. In fact, perusal and storage of these has become one of our important occupations. It could rightly be asked why more analysis is needed, when digesting what we have is becoming an impossibility.

The problem of planning and development, however, is not a matter of statistical and other computation alone, of per capita income, of num-

ber of motor vehicles, wireless sets, bicycles, railway engines and carriages or even fertilizer distribution or the rate of annual growth in the economy. These perhaps could be valuable guides to development if other factors like public apathy, the increasing numbers of unemployed, increasing poverty amongst large sections of the people – particularly among the landless agricultural labour – were not present. One criteria of poverty if not in money, at least in multinational terms, is the continual diminution of milk and milk products from the almost vegetarian diet of most of our rural people – the people who produce these. It could be said that this is their own choice that they sell it all to the urban buyer – the government dairy, the private consumer. But there must be something terribly astray with a planning programmed which leads to such choice.

The peasants, the artisans at the dam site, in the factory or in the village workshop and the youth are the wealth of any country, more so of India. These are the people for whom we ostensibly plan, spend hours of debate and frequent sleepless nights. It is not that our leaders and planners are not concerned and moved. Few would also dispute the social aims and objects of our planning. However, we seem to have a capacity to forget ourselves in our self-made dreams which are nowhere near reality. Our lack of frankness in public debate – perhaps born of our servitude for two centuries and consequent feelings of inferiority – makes us all the more cynical in private, thus further widening the chasm. The result is that the people, for whom we plan and weave dreams, are seldom anywhere in the picture. More often they are just labourers, wage earners with little sense of participation or adventure in the India we plan to reconstruct.

The reasons for such apathy are perhaps very deep, somewhere very near the soul of India. Yet that soul has to awaken, before we proceed from dams and steel plants to the flowering of the human being, of the Indian we have deemed to be ignorant, of the people of India whom we describe as teeming millions equating them with ant-heaps. Such awakening, however, is not impossible – Gandhiji did it against heavier odds. All of us in a way are heir to Gandhiji, what we lack is proportion and humility.

It is perhaps also true that the assistance which we have received from the rest of the world, world bodies or individual nations, while making our task easier in some respects has indirectly helped in making us removed from our ordinary man and woman. Our fascination with gadgetry and minor comforts and such easy assistance, valuable as it could be in different circumstances, has left us little reason to be compelled to go to the peo-

ple, to cajole or convince or persuade them to see our viewpoint or convert us in turn. In fact, we seem to have largely lost all spheres of contact with the planned.

No plan, however perfect, with all the assistance the world could bestow on us, can become a reality till we regain this contact. This is also not a job that could be dealt with by exhortations from one forum or another, by any committee, or some more august body. These have their value, but only when a movement of reconstruction, which, while preserving the spirit of Indian oneness, deciding its aims and targets according to local need and desire from area to area, could gather the people, make them partners in plans which, if not very grandiose, are at least after their hearts.

8

Letter to all Members of the Indian Parliament[1]

November 21, 1962

New Delhi

Dear Friend,

In a circular recently sent to all Congress MPs, MLAs, MLCs and Pradesh and District Congress Committees, the All-India Congress Committee has said: "Positive stand against criticism of the Prime Minister should be taken. It must be emphasised that those who criticise him are traitors."

In a broadcast over the All India Radio announcing the fall of Bomdilla, the Prime Minister said:

> "We are not going to tolerate this kind of invasion of India by any foreign country."
>
> "We must train ourselves and we must steel ourselves to meet all these reverses and to make our determination still firmer and to do all we can to repel and throw out the invader from India. We shall not be content till the invader goes out of India or is pushed out. We shall not accept any terms that he may offer because he may think that we are a little frightened by some little setbacks."
>
> "Any set-back which may come to us in this way, which has been thrust upon us, will not permit us to waver in our determination."

He ended with:

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[1]After writing this letter, the author was arrested under Defence of India rule for calling PM a traitor.

> "I want to make a pledge to them here and now that we shall see this matter to the end and the end will have to be victory for India."

Alas! these are words and sentiments which the country has been hearing for the past 15 years. Only the context changes. One day it may be grow-more-food; another, the building of modern temples symbolised by steel plants and dams; yet another time, national integration or our quarrel with Pakistan or the endless fight against old prejudices and a hundred other things. The fact is that all content has been drained out from such exhortations and instead of leading to courage, to determination, to hope, each pronouncement of the Prime Minister leaves the people limp.

Perhaps the Prime Minister has changed, has seen the light. But how is one to be convinced. The actions of the Government of India during the last 30 days are no pointers. It is not to ignore the steps Government has taken since October 20. These, in fact, can be enumerated. The Prime Minister did demote the Defence Minister and then sacked him; but soon after he publicly regretted this step. A National Defence Council and a National Citizens Committee have been formed. The 30 odd members of the first have yet to meet. About the second, the less said the better. May be, with God's grace, the Prime Minister and his daughter, who respectively chairs these two august bodies and the Prime Minister's court can save this country and its freedom. Dare one hope? The past gives no assurance.

Perhaps this time, the Prime Minister is his old 1929 self again. But how does one know?

Nobody can expect an old man of seventy-three to stand shoulder to shoulder with men of the Indian Army at Bomdilla (which is no more) or Chushul or some other border posts. But surely, if he feels as he claims, if his pledge has any meaning, if his patriotism has any passion, the Prime Minister can still move over to Tejpur or Gauhati or Shillong or some other place, offer comfort and confidence to the people of Assam, supervise the generals appointed by him and be available on the spot till, as he says, we get rid of the Chinese from Indian soil. But does he have courage? Does he believe in his own words? Does he have hope?

In reply to the Government of India, on November 18, 1950, the Chinese had said: "The Chinese people's liberation army will liberate the Tibetan people and defend the frontiers of China. This is the firm policy of the Chinese Government."

Which were those borders which China had referred to? Did the Government of India enquire? Did the Prime Minister think?

It brings popularity to call the Chinese "this treacherous enemy" but had not one had sufficient notice? Twelve long years is not such a short time.

Time is running out fast for this country. Not that if the Chinese occupy a large part of the country; they cannot be thrown out in due time; not that truth ultimately does not win. But is this the fate of this country to first allow the aggressors to come in and then exert for endless time in pushing them out?

Firstly, it is for the Prime Minister, personally, to make his own choice. Can he be physically with the people who are defending India at our borders and the citizens of Assam who need assurance? Has he the nerve? Can he work as member of a team; can he rise above personal glory? Above all, is he really sorry for all the mess which is there today? In olden times one in his position would have crawled hundreds and thousands of miles to beg forgiveness of one's fellow beings and of the gods that may be. He at least can tender an unqualified public apology. The people of this country would not deny forgiveness to an old man, if he were really repentant.

It is no crime that in this crisis in India he is not equal to the task. He has done his part in days gone by. But today is no occasion to look to the past. The need is to act so that the Chinese do not come any further and are pushed back in reasonable time; more so, that the fight which is going on serves some purpose. One wants to be certain that we are fighting this battle with firmness, according to some plan.

Today, the Chinese have come with a cease-fire. This may rightly be a ruse. But if and when the time for negotiations or a settlement comes, one must have people who can do the job and who can also be trusted by the people. The Prime Minister's past record is of a man engaged in a private deal.

If the Prime Minister cannot decide, it is for the Congress Party or the Parliament of this country, or failing both for the head of the Indian Republic to make the choice for the Prime Minister that he retires, and give India a government which knows what it is doing, which does not talk in terms of our eventual triumph but does something today.

The people of this country have been shamed; they have been bewildered by the ways of Government. How long can they wait? It is for the wise

people in this country, whoever they are; to see that this shame and anger does not burst its bounds, does not lead to a road which no one desires. Let those be put in charge who can act against the aggressors and not against their own people.

The people who criticise the Prime Minister are no less patriotic than he. If anything, their patriotism is more robust.

9

Role of Gandhians in Nation Building

[Circulated in April 1964 and published by Janata, Bombay, May 1964]

What is the role of the Gandhians, the constructive workers and all those who are engaged in varied voluntary activities in the post-1947 era? Is it (a) to sketch the future society of their varied dreams and to practice it in the present, in the best way they can, or (b) by personal example, help in the setting up of better standards in various fields of human endeavour, or (c) to be at the beck and call of the Swarajya government dedicated to the welfare state; to do all that which it wishes to be done by them, or (d) is it in the words of Gandhiji, though said in another clime and age, it is still their main task to help the people in "the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused" and further of "educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority".

It is with much sadness and considerable hesitation that the writer is putting down the following thoughts on paper. Almost certainly many amongst the Gandhians must have considered what is being discussed below much more seriously. There is also, no doubt, that the situation we are in, has distressed them much more and that it is not lack of realisation but more basic reasons which hamper them in responding in the right manner to the demands of the day. Not possessing their patience nor having their experience and foresight, the present writer is compelled to express himself publicly. In this, he hopes, he has their indulgence.

I

At the time of independence, several paths were open to all those who had been participating in the freedom struggle under Gandhiji. Gandhiji's view was that except a few who may be required and were especially interested to get in government, all others should become members of a vast Lok

Sevak Sangh to rebuild and rejuvenate Indian society from some two centuries of neglect, disruption and misrule. More than the government it was for these loksevaks to bring swaraj, which had reached Delhi, to every city, town, village and in fact to help reach it to every citizen. To give flesh and bone to this swaraj, he advocated a new polity, new economic relationships and the testing of all technology from the viewpoint of the new society. The constructive program. which he gave to the country in the twenties and to which various items got added to, till the very end were according to Gandhiji, the vehicle of this swaraj.

Matters worked out differently. Except a few, most of the freedom fighters chose to be associated with government either serving as its pillars or as agents at several levels or as its official critics. The few who remained out and to most of whom politics invariably had been an anathema decided to re-dedicate themselves anew in constructive activity, with one difference, however. The difference lay in their attitude to government, the government which freedom had bestowed.

The constructive program as it originally arose was Gandhiji's answer to alien rule. Even though there were periods of relative co-existence, the Indian freedom movement had no quarter for all that symbolised and resulted from the alien rule in India. The constructive program did not recognise the relevance of anything that was done by the government and intended to completely replace or recast everything linked with India's subjection. After independence, even when those wedded to the constructive program deplored many aspects of the new government's activity and thinking, by and large, they have acquiesced to most of what has been initiated or carried out by the government ever since. Yet there has been neither any commitment nor any enthusiasm in this acquiescence.

It may be possible to argue that the Gandhian constructive workers and much more so, the others who had not been reared in the tradition of satyagraha took a wrong turn in being soft to the government of free India and conceding it respectability. Nonetheless, though it may have been possible for them to take a firmer line and publicly disagree with whatever they felt were contrary to the cherished national aims, it would have been unnatural as well as unrealistic if they had continued their earlier stance, of limitless hostility to governmental authority, to the new government. The government of free India belonged to them as much as to other citizens. Their error lay not in changing their earlier attitude of hostility and boycott but in restricting their own sphere of activity. The choice they made in altogeth-

er devoting themselves to a routine and ritualistic constructive program or its equivalent in non-Gandhian circles, well-meaning as it was, defeated their very purpose and took them out of the larger field of national policy and endeavour.

II

It is to be greatly deplored that none amongst the Gandhians have really given much thought to their role in present-day society after the passing away of Gandhiji. It appears as if one did not even find the time or had the inclination to think about the role of the government and define one's own attitude to it. For many, the government signified an unmitigated evil, not to be dreamt of in the society of their dreams. The others, on the contrary, though they deplored one or the other policies and actions of government, somehow reposed all trust in the elder members of the freedom fighters' fraternity who now ran the country. The view that, even if in the long run one may wish to do away with government altogether, in the short run as long as governmental and other authority exists, one has to be vigilant and control all authority, does not seem to have concerned the constructive and voluntary workers much.

Despite their softness and acquiescence to the doings of the rulers, the Gandhians have been reluctant to admit, perhaps even to themselves, that in a free society most activity including that of democratic government is not so very different to what may be termed as 'constructive program'. The quality and the techniques of the two may differ but in essence both aim to achieve the same purpose.

The difficulty of the Gandhians seems to be their mental commitment to an 'ideal society' which has unconsciously made them indifferent to improvements in the present and has led them to (i) vicara-pracara, or (ii) experimentation with models of the future, or (iii) a more or less mechanical repetition of earlier personal austerity and devotion to ways learnt in the days of Bardoli, Sabarmati and Sevagram.

All this is not to be decried. But one must state that the Gandhians have failed with regard to "the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused", which according to Gandhiji was a pre-condition of real swaraj. Gandhiji further said, "Swarajya is to be obtained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority." In their concern for eliminating the State altogether or because

of their attachment to a little oasis of constructive activity, the Gandhians have become party to the decline of whatever little capacity the people of India had acquired to regulate and control authority in the days of Gandhiji.

III

It is not the intention of the writer to decry all activities that thousands of constructive and voluntary workers have been engaged in, in their respective areas and fields. Many of them have done pioneering work which demands greater notice and extension. All of them, one way or the other, have been serving the community and providing much succour and support to the needy. Their effort in making life bearable for those amongst whom they work deserves high praise.

Nevertheless, despite the quality of such work and the devotion, loving care and personal concern which usually goes along with it, the sum total of the achievement of a few scores of thousands of constructive and voluntary workers amounts to little in relation to total national activity and even in terms of what is directly being done by the government. It would just about amount to even less than one per cent of governmental effort. Further, notwithstanding all the noble qualities of the constructive and voluntary effort, our society is much grosser today and is more prone to falsehood and emptiness than it ever has been in recent times.

From the above, it may seem as if I am advocating the giving up of all constructive and voluntary activity and endeavour. Far from it, my plea is that we must take stock of the present situation in India and should reformulate our primary role in the running of Indian society. I am, by no means, suggesting the waging of a struggle or the launching of a satyagraha against authority. These may come in their own time by the deliberations of those who are competent in this regard. My only concern is that despite all the dedication, goodness and hard work, life in India is becoming more and more meaningless and much harder to live for most people. It is the irony of our freedom struggle that after independence, most people have begun to feel much less free in their day-today life and find themselves harassed practically at every step. Such an occurrence may be no one's particular fault. But no thinking people, least of all the Gandhians, the constructive and voluntary workers, can allow such a state of affairs to continue. What is happening is negation of the very basis of constructive activity.

IV

One other point. Their unthinking acquiescence in various matters probably in the pursuit of speedier 'constructive' activity has resulted in the Gandhians even lending their support to what Gandhiji would have called the perpetuation of various falsehoods. Illustrations of this are plentiful. The more innocent, yet probably more damaging, are the constructive workers formally accepting, though actually not agreeing to, the purposes, procedures and methods, as stated by the government regarding various programs of training, apprenticeship etc., in the running of which they provide their auspices.

Take for instance the training of village level workers. According to the government, the village level worker is or should be a friend, philosopher and guide of the villager. He is supposed to provide such wisdom and guidance in various fields of rural activity including agriculture, education, the various crafts, etc. In reality, the village level worker is no such thing and even if one could imagine him to be Prime Ministerial material, there is no earthly possibility of his fulfilling such a role for generations to come. At best, he is a runner of the village, a clerk, a literate younger brother to the village community who can count on his ability to get small jobs done for them which require approaching authority, be it governmental or other. His normal role is of an errand boy and at certain moments he can display his ingenuity and understanding by being the communication channel between the village and the urban world. All this, though earthy, is very honourable and useful. Further, such a definition of his role would have given much more satisfaction and fulfilment and a wish to achieve much more to each one of the thousands of village level workers we have in the field. Instead, there is widespread frustration, cynicism and disbelief amongst practically all village level workers in what they are supposed to be doing.

By taking a firm stand on such matters and pointing out the meaningless-ness of such hyperbole, the constructive workers could have done much in reducing and halting the ever-increasing cynicism and disbelief.

V

One could cite any number of situations where one has unthinkingly compromised one's principles and the regard for truth. More than harming oneself, such compromise has done immense public harm and has been

responsible for undermining and corroding the right responses of the people towards injustice, falsehoods of various types, callousness, etc. It has further made the people sceptical of even modest claims and achievements. Hoping for the moon when even the earth may be slipping underneath has rendered meaningless all dreams, however noble these were.

My plea to the Gandhians and leaders of voluntary effort is that they should sit down to reconsider their role in present-day India. More than any other group they are still nearer the people and have not altogether become hypnotised by slogans of various types and prey to a variety of alien idioms. They can still be able, with some effort, to overcome the barriers of mind and culture which has begun to separate the people of India from the ruling elite, of which they themselves are an integral part. Such kinship, however, need not be their misfortune.

Given will and determination and above all understanding and compassion for everyone, the Gandhians can still turn the ruling elite from its callousness, misdeeds, authoritarianism and indifference towards doing what is desired or suits the people of India. Alone, however, they cannot do it. Even Gandhiji was able to do what he did because the people were with him. He symbolised in himself what they felt and cherished and aspired to, and yet were unable to express it by themselves. The Gandhians and the voluntary workers must at least for the present put away their own fanciful ideas, theories and solutions no matter of what origin, and begin to listen to the people, to make an attempt to appreciate what they wish today or tomorrow and help in the achievement of their modest needs. If they need to sermonise let them do it at the doorsteps of the ruling elite. In relation to the people, they must first learn to be their errand boys and make a success of such task. Some day they may have an opportunity to marshal forth their own views if these still interest them. For the present, they should desist from selling their own wares and become spokesmen of the people.

10

Functions of the President of the Indian Republic According to Jawaharlal Nehru

[A letter to Editor, Everyman's, New Delhi. London, December 24, 1974]

Reading of the controversy amongst the Sarvodaya group (Everyman's, December 22) with regard to their attitude to the Government at Delhi it appears that they at least, and perhaps others also, are back to the 1949 situation. Writing on December 8, 1949 to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Sri Jawaharlal Nehru, the then prime minister, mentioned,

> "I am told that some weeks ago a Sarvodaya conference was held at Wardha and some of the speeches delivered there were bitter in the extreme. A week or so ago, a meeting was held in Calcutta in the Indian Association room, presumably, to consider peasantry problems. J.C. Kumarappa presided and Prafulla Ghosh and others of his group were present. Kumarappa and Prafulla Ghosh delivered fiery speeches not only against the Central Government and the West Bengal Government but also calling upon the peasantry to follow the scorched earth policy so as to prevent procurement of grain, the objective being just to create more trouble for the governments and bring them down."

Quite like his daughter, the current Prime Minister, Sri Nehru was hurt and angry by such an attitude and felt the opposition and advice uncalled for. But why the Sarvodaya people, or some of them, were so unreasonable can, to a large extent, be understood from Sri Nehru's own observations earlier on in the same letter. He said,

> "What do we see around us now? I do not refer to the difficult economic situation that we have to face. That, of course, is important and urgent enough. But what distresses me even more is the

> cracking up, with great rapidity, of the noble structure that Bapu built. With all its failings, the Congress represented the spirit and mind of India and I do not see anything else that can take its place without disrupting the country and bringing chaos and suffering. This Congress is simply fading away before our eyes. Even a fading might have been tolerated, but something worse is happening. There is no discipline left, no sense of common effort, no co-operation, no attempt at constructive effort (apart from a few), and our energies are concentrated in disruption and destruction." It is probable that those who met at Wardha then felt that "the cracking up, with great rapidity" and "the fading away" was caused by the government and the great leaders who ran it and the best thing was to bring such government down through means of their own devising.

While the above remarks about cracking up etc., may have been made for a specific purpose they were by no means an isolated thinking-aloud on Sri Nehru's part. Earlier on June 19, he observed to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel,

> "We are rapidly getting out of touch with public opinion and becoming just a government and nothing more. An extreme development of this is Calcutta. But even in Delhi the Congress has hardly any positions left. They are afraid of holding public meetings, unless some dominating personality is present. Unless we wake up to these realities, we shall be completely isolated."

It would be instructive to know what explanation Dr. Rajendra Prasad had as to the causes of such a situation. Writing on December 12, to Sri Nehru, he observed,

> "It may be worthwhile going into the causes which have brought about this unfortunate pass and I may do so if you may permit me later in another letter." But whether he ever wrote such a letter, or not, the causes of such breakdown between the Government and the people and the distress and anger amongst the Sarvodaya group in 1949 is well worth enquiring into.

Yet, whatever may have led to the 1949 situation, the intervening 25 years since Sri Nehru made these observations, now look as if they were not much more than a waiting period. In some ways even such waiting may have had its utility, though it seems more likely that India has lost much more, particularly most of the hope and goodwill generated by the freedom

movement, than it has gained. Anyhow long pending fundamental issues, so brazenly swept aside during 1947-49, once more confront India.

Notwithstanding the widespread euphoria, the physical departure of the British was, in its essentials, merely, as the British so aptly termed it, a "transfer of power". Having accepted this "transfer" and all that it implied psychologically as well as administratively, it should, in retrospect, be understandable why India was not then able to chart out a path of its own and create appropriate norms of administrative, judicial, and political life. It also explains the mess, which has been accumulating at an ever-increasing rate, and the much-discussed corruption in politics. These twin manifestations, along with many others, are the consequence of this retrograde step of accepting to continue the British erected system. It vitiated Indian thinking and behaviour and more so of those in top-most positions. Even the choice of a person for the presidentship of the then emerging Indian Republic, according to its Prime Minister (Sri Nehru to Dr.Rajendra Prasad, September 11,1949), seemed to depend on the approbation of the "large diplomatic personnel" in the republic's capital, and the incumbent's ability to adapt himself to "the numerous formalities and functions that the Governor General has to observe". In such a situation it is small wonder that politics and politicians went under. Whether the great leaders wished it or not, the opting for the British-erected system implied the elimination or discrediting of most of those who participated in the freedom movement and were chosen to elective positions at different levels.

Having multiplied itself manifold, and got further accustomed to power and its rewards and opportunities it is natural that the established order wishes to perpetuate itself or at least be allowed to drift. But the issue before the Sarvodaya people, or for that matter even before Congress men and women, is not that of support or opposition to Srimati Indira Gandhi, or to the various chief ministers but the issue is of finding, shaping, and establishing more appropriate and creative ways of administering to the wishes and needs of the Indian people, a task which has been evaded thus far.

11

The End of the Indian Emergency

[Speech in London as Chairman of the meeting at the Indian YMCA on March 26, 1977]

It seems to me befitting, as it would to you all, that we have assembled, this evening, in this hall, which is named after Mahatma Gandhi, to celebrate what may well be called a miracle. The Friends of India Society, at whose invitation we have all assembled must be congratulated, not only for all that they have done in mobilising world opinion, particularly the opinion of persons originally of Indian origin around the world, but also for having shown such promptitude in holding this celebration. I am sure, all of us join together in sending our warmest good wishes to India, and to the newly elected Lok Sabha, and the Government which is presently being formed.

This miracle we are celebrating is a virtual peaceful revolution, a wholly Gandhian transformation of an impossible political situation, through the electoral process. The credit for it is due to many quarters. Foremost, it is due to the maturity and discernment of the people of India. They have proved, perhaps not for the first time, the truth of an old Indian saying, "*Satyamev Jayate na Annritarn*", that, it is Truth which invariably wins and not falsehood. It is true that most of the Indian people did not much take to the streets, did not engage in open protest, did not go for violence against their tormentors, during the period of the Emergency. Somehow, regrettable or not, it seems that if they feel that open protest will be of no avail, they retire into themselves. This used to happen much during British rule of which I have learnt a bit. Many of you perhaps know much more. As long back as 1811, the people of Varanasi, and other areas, after a widespread and heroic protest, against the imposition of a tax on houses by the British, finally felt cowed down. The dimensions of this protest were such that all work stopped in Varanasi, and many other towns, and even the people at the cremation grounds stopped burning the dead bodies. After they were cowed down, the Varanasi Collector wrote to the Government that

the people felt that they could not resist the forcible realisation of the tax by distraint on their possessions, "but they would not concur," or pay the tax willingly. This sort of thing must have happened time and again in India. But as we see today when the Indian people get the opportunity, they stand forth and have their say.

Next, credit is due to the countless numbers, and more so, their families, who have specifically suffered for their convictions during the last 20 months, and very many even earlier. Besides mental anguish, the suffering has been through imprisonment. Only a few had, what is termed political prisoner status in India, which gives one tolerable food, reading material and the like. A great many had beatings, sometimes even excruciating torture, and often lost their jobs, and had their family dwellings confiscated etc. They and their families have shown great fortitude.

Thirdly, great credit is due to the world community, who, by and large, have stood steadfast with the freedom loving, and democratically minded Indian people. The British reaction to this Indian horror has been especially creditable. If I am permitted, may I say, that during the past 20 months, in a way, the British have done some penance for their own past great wrong doings to India.

But may I be allowed to mention one name, as I am certain we all agree that none of this would have been possible, at least for some time to come, without this one man, Jayaprakash Narayan. Whether he is a saint, or a politician, or a radical, or a reactionary, I do not know. But it seems to me, and perhaps, to you all, that in Mr. Raj Narain (who got elected against Mrs. Indira Gandhi), and most others, who have been elected against Indiraji's nominees, the people of India saw the face of Jayaprakash Narayan, and what he essentially stood for.

I am sure, all of us here join the people of India, in praying, even if we are not praying people, for Jayaprakash Narayan's life, so that he may continue to guide India towards a new and more relevant path. Many of us here, no doubt, as very many in India, may not approve of all that he says, or stands for. But I am sure we all agree, including most of those who belong to the Congress Party, or sympathise with it, as also those who support the CPM in India, that today he is one man who can help us get out of the present morass, and get launched on a more worthwhile future for India's people. We already missed one such chance 30 years ago.

We must not, however, forget Mrs. Indira Gandhi. We here, and the people in India, I am sure, are thankful to her that during the last two

months of her rule, as Prime Minister she has, by and large, kept to democratic norms. Perhaps, some do regret her personal defeat. I remember hearing several of my young countrymen and countrywomen express such regret on a BBC program on the 21st morning. Yet, I think, this is the best thing that could have happened, not only for India, but for her also. This personal defeat should enable her to pull out of an impossible mess, which she herself created, and not any other on whom blame may now be thrown, into a deserved private life. We must remember she is 60 this year. And in India this is no small age.

Incidentally, if I had any say, which is perhaps as well that I don't have, I should think that it will be good for India's future, if a convention, or rule, is soon established, that no one will stay in any elected place (except perhaps for the presidentship of the Indian Republic), after 60. Further, that no one will be eligible for membership of any statutorily elected body, for more than 10 years. 'The younger generation in India and the coming generations must be allowed to make their own contributions to the running of our country.

I must, however, add that this suggestion is no reflection on our present elderly and respected leaders. They have done great things for the country. They themselves are victims of the politics of the past 30 years. If things had worked out differently, they themselves, perhaps, would have made such a suggestion. Further, in this connection, though not in the sense he implied, as also in the emphasis on tree planting, I personally, do agree, with Mrs. Gandhi's younger son. But it is unfortunate that no one told him, that the reason there were so many old leaders in Indian political life was because neither his grandfather, nor his mother, would allow anyone to gain renown, much less succeed them. Naturally, a backlog of gifted, but elderly, politicians have been thus waiting for over 20 years, in the corridors of Indian politics. One hopes that now an opportunity has arisen for all those who have been long waiting to have their personal desires speedily fulfilled. For, the Indian norm till recent times has been of young people shining and excelling themselves, and the elderly devoting themselves to the pursuit of a quiet, or spiritual life or as watchdogs of the nation. To mention just a few, Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Arjuna, Abhimanyu, the first Shankaracharya, even Akbar, Shivaji, Vivekanand were very young when they made their great contributions in their respective spheres.

It is really unfortunate, both for Indiraji and ourselves, that she was not as sensible, as Sir Harold Wilson has recently been, and resigned as

Prime Minister in 1972, or thereabouts, when great many Indians still thought highly of her. Anyhow, if she retires from public life now, we may be sure that the people of India will gladly allow her and her family, to enjoy peaceful private lives and also accord her due respect.

A new life now begins for India. I am sure we all hope that it will indeed be a new beginning, as the manifestos of the Janata Party and its allies promise; that the ordinary people of India, their hamlets, villages, towns, and cities, their professional skills as well as social life will now start to grow and prosper. All these have faced great disruption and neglect for nearly two centuries. And though it is no use bemoaning the past, a real reconstruction of India is overdue. In this task, as we must all realize, India will need every Indian's contribution not only of those who have been elected, against Mrs. Gandhi's nominees, and those who elected them, but also the help and active co-operation of most Congressmen, who felt gagged during Mrs. Gandhi's rule, and also of other groups including the so-called Naxalites, thousands of whom have languished in prisons for years. India also needs the goodwill of the world, though, one hopes, not its material or technical assistance. To really find its own path India will have to rely on its own resources, and the ingenuity of its people. Then only, having charted out the ways, technologies, etc. which suit it, will it also be able to contribute something of value to the problems of the world community.

Lastly, in the great endeavour in which the Indian people have set the Indian State, one hopes that all those who have suffered through imprisonment, torture, dismissals etc., are not forgotten. Many also resigned their jobs in protest. The most illustrious of these latter, as we all know, is Justice Khanna, who stood for the people and their fundamental rights and liberties throughout the period of Emergency. I, personally, do hope, and perhaps you all agree, that Chief Justice Beg, by now, realizes the great error through which he was appointed to his present post. Being the old gentleman he is and following the footsteps of the judges of India's long past, he will perhaps now of his own volition, resign from his post and thus enable the new Government to restore Justice Khanna to his rightful place, even though that may be only for a very short time. But, besides Justice Khanna, there are perhaps hundreds of thousands, and their families, who have been greatly wronged. I am certain you shall all join me in hoping that their suffering, and needs do not get overlooked.

I have taken too much of your time and perhaps somewhat bored you. Thank you very much for your patience.

12

Integrating the Notified Tribes

[Written in Patna on 7.12.1977]

The fifth report of the Bihar Backward Classes Commission (commonly known by the name of its chairman, as the Mungerilal commission) deals with the de-notified groups in Bihar.[1] But as the report does not provide any data on the number, or total population of these groups, it is difficult to judge the extent and seriousness of the question that their prolonged and administratively enforced condition poses to the rest of Bihar society. Probably, such data, as the names and the populations of the respective groups according to the areas they inhabit, is available with the state authorities, or with the Census Commission. The availability of such data is essential in formulating any relevant policies.

While the commission has shown much concern about the problems faced by these groups the most important part of the report seems to be its introduction. According to it, these groups are largely of such people whose ancestors were warriors and gave unceasing battle to the British till they got exhausted and succumbed to the overwhelming British power. Besides being warriors, their main occupations are said to have been of iron-smithy (lohar)",[2] hunting, jugglery and acrobatics, snake-charming and acting. After their total subjugation, on the one hand, they were compulsorily excluded from the rest of society and put under constant police vigilance, and on the other hand, to somehow satisfy their pressing needs (and perhaps also as a symbol of rebellion) took to thieving, begging, etc.

[1]Fifth Report of Backward Classes Commission (about De-notified Groups), Government of Bihar, 1976.

[2]It is quite probable that a number of these groups were actual producers of iron and steel rather than mere repairers of iron implements. According to eighteenth and early nineteenth century data, there was extensive production of iron and steel (though on a cottage basis) in most parts of India.

Furthermore, they used to be put to forced labour under statute, and in the later stages some of them put under the charge of the (British) Salvation Army Organisation.

It is strange that while aware of this background, the analysis and recommendations of the commission make no use of it. Largely, perhaps, it is because the commission did not have any persons from these groups associated with its deliberations. Naturally, therefore, what follows the introduction, though well-meaning and benevolent, falls into stereotyped analysis and solutions. For example, instead of thinking of encouraging their earlier talents (which must be part of their folklore and in all probability still surviving amongst them), like iron-working, jugglery, acrobatics, acting etc., the recommendations are to compulsorily convert them into agriculturists, weavers etc., or at the most into class IV government servants. And, though, love and concern, etc., are advocated as qualities in those who are to work amongst them, the whole tone of the recommendatory part is condemnatory of their ways, and off and on advocates, the punitive approach. For instance, para 2.3 says, "But along with it, we shall have to deal strictly with such of the inhabitants of the habitation (*padav*) who do not want to benefit from the welfare schemes." It is really sad that instead of admiring the bravery of their ancestors, and their own fortitude to have survived such persecution and deprivation we, perhaps unthinkingly, tend to treat them the way the British treated them. If we mean to integrate them as equal citizens after convincing them of our good faith (so far, their experience of authority is indeed terrible), we will need to ask them what they themselves would prefer, find out their inherent aptitudes, and understand what their own ideas and perceptions of 'welfare' etc., are. It would be strange indeed if these people themselves were to have no ideas about questions intimately concerning their individual and social lives.

The report also makes much of the laxity of their sexual mores, of their being given to drinking, and similar habits. Even if all this is true, they are not unique in having such practices. By the look of things, the 'liberated' higher strata of our ruling classes, especially those in the metropolitan towns, do not seem to be much different in such matters. Only, while the latter possess everything, including access to the most expensive educational and medical facilities, the former have practically nothing which they can call their own. It would be for the good of our society if such double standards in judging people were abandoned and we also cultivated a little tolerance towards those who are in no position to hit back.

13

A Matter to Ponder Over

(Residences and Pensions for Members of Legislature)

[Written in Patna on 9.12.1977]

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association held a conference in Delhi at the end of 1975. Besides whatever else it may have achieved; one product of this conference is a book entitled *The Commonwealth Parliaments*. While the book has gone into a second edition[1] within a year it seems that some of the information it provides has gone quite unnoticed in India. The most revealing information is that given in Annexure II, entitled "Salary, allowances, and other main facilities available to officers and members of Parliament in various Commonwealth countries." That it needs to be seriously pondered over not only by our legislators, but also by the general public will be apparent by the following.

The information provided is country by country, for 23 countries of the Commonwealth. It deals with salaries, allowances, and other facilities available to the Speaker, Chairmen of Committees, Leader of the Opposition, and members of the Lower Houses (House of Representatives, House of Commons, Lok Sabha, etc.), of these countries as well as similar salaries, allowances, other facilities etc. of the officers and members of the Upper Houses (Senate, House of Lords, Rajya Sabha etc.), in countries where these latter exist.

The information regarding the Members is the most detailed. It is divided under (i) Salary, (ii) Special allowances, (iii) Travel allowances and facilities, (iv) Other allowances, (v) Pensions and (vi) Other main facilities. Some of these heads, especially (iii) and (vi), are further sub-divided.

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[1]S. L. Shakder. *The Commonwealth Parliaments*, Lok Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi (second revision edition, 1976).

As the amounts of salaries etc. are in the countries' individual currencies, they are not easily comparable. Even if for the purposes of comparison they were converted into any one currency such comparison may not serve any purpose as each country has a different per capita income and wide inter-country differences in the scales of payment for similar jobs in other fields. The more important information in this Annexure is not the amounts but the information relating to other facilities and the principles from which such facilities seem to be derived.

If ease of correspondence between members of Parliament and their constituents were one of the tests of a better functioning democratic system Canada comes top in it. Here, to quote what is published, "Mail sent by or addressed to a Member of House of Commons may be transmitted to or from any point in Canada free of postage.[2] The members of Canada's Senate, and those who write to them, also enjoy this facility. Members of Parliament in certain other countries (Australia, Bahamas, Fiji, Guyana, Jamaica, Malawi, Malta, Mauritius, New Zealand, Singapore, Sri Lanka, UK, and Zambia) also enjoy this facility to varying extent but not those who write to them (i.e., their constituents, or other nationals of the country) as the latter do in Canada.

The major information, which should interest Indians even more, relates to the provision of free medical facilities and residential accommodation for members and their families in the capital city and that of provision for members' pensions. A reading of these three heads makes a curious tale.

In the provision of free medical consultation and treatment for members of Parliament and also their families, India is not unique. Indian members of Parliament share this honour along with their brother (or sister) members of the Parliament of Singapore. The members of Parliament in Malaysia also enjoy "free medical attention"[3] but seemingly only for their own persons and not for their families.

But Indian members are unique (amongst the 28 countries for which information is provided) in being provided with a Governmental family residence (no doubt on some rent), in the capital city. While some of the countries (like Australia, Canada, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and UK) do provide their Parliament members varying degree of office accommodation,

[2]Ibid. p. 241
[3]Ibid. p. 255

none have felt the necessity, or are perhaps not prosperous enough, to maintain hundreds of family residences, for providing such facility to them! (As is well known such facility is now also provided, though comparatively on an austere scale, to members of practically all State Legislatures in India, at the State capitals.)

Yet while the members of Parliament in India have scored on their brother members in other commonwealth countries in terms of Governmental family residences as well as in free medical facilities for themselves and their families, till recently at least, they had lost as regards provision of pension for Parliamentary membership. In a large number of the countries, especially in what may be called the 'white' commonwealth (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and UK) some sort of pension, or an annual retiring allowance is provided for.

The question arises, why are there such variations in matters like postal facilities, free medical attention, Governmental residences in the capital cities, and pension provisions amongst countries of the Commonwealth? There must be many explanations and some of them, perhaps, of a historical nature. Those which especially seem to concern India may be mentioned here.

As said above, if correspondence between a member of Parliament and a constituent is an attribute of better democratic functioning, then Canada seems to be more democratic than others. Similarly, the provision of some sort of a pension, after a certain number of years of membership (in the British House of Commons, it is after four years), also seems to be indicative of a more democratic polity. It is only Parliaments which derive their membership mainly from old established aristocracies, or the prosperous classes (as the British House of Lords does), or consist of retired individuals who already enjoy some pension or have accumulated enough during their working lives, that a member after a number of years of membership of a Legislature, does not require some sort of a pension provision. Or, perhaps, there is no need for such a provision in countries where graft in public life is the general rule. Or, again possibly, no pension for Parliamentary or Legislature membership may be required in a country of Gandhian conception, where, ideally, the family and the society take care of such persons through traditional devices, and also those who enter public life, live no differently than the ordinary populace does. India, so far, fortunately has not reached the category of countries where graft in public life is routine. On the other hand, India is nearly as far away, contrary to what may be

claimed by some of our leaders, from the Gandhian conception as most other lands. The non-provision of a pension for members of legislatures is due to no conscious Indian decision. It is largely because such a provision did not exist for the members of the British House of Commons when we formed our present legislative bodies. So, unless India wishes to draw the membership of its Legislatures largely from the aristocratic, prosperous, or retired sections the provision of some type of a pension for outgoing members is an appropriate step. The continuing trends are the greater democratisation of the central and state legislatures by the increasing representation in them of those coming from ordinary family backgrounds. Such a trend needs encouragement. Further, if the wish is to have a healthier polity the rate of pension may be so determined that it is optimum for, say, a membership of two terms, and proportionately lesser amounts for a longer membership. Such a step may help inject more young talent in the Indian Legislatures.

While the provision of pension after a number of years of Legislative membership is imperative for democratising a polity, the provision of special facilities for residential family accommodation have the very opposite result. The reason why we have the latter provision is historical. Our Legislatures have grown out of the British colonial system in India. Over a period of some 70-80 years the Viceroy's and Governors' Councils gradually emerged as the present Indian Parliament and state Legislatures. As Governmental residences, and medical attention were invariably provided for members of the earlier Councils (as also for rest of the British officer cadre, both civil and military) these continued to be provided, though in the later period on a less sumptuous scale, for their successors. Quite unthinkingly, the democratic representatives of free India moulded themselves into the ways of the colonial rulers. They do not seem to have realized that while the colonial ruler had a need, and some sort of a justification to have such facilities, in a strange and hostile land, thousands of miles away from home, where he was duty bound to return ultimately, and further had no dearth of resources at his disposal to spend on his comfort, our Legislators not being colonials, neither have such need nor any justification. Their home is their constituency, and the legislative job they do is only a small part of what they are elected for. When not needed in the legislature (i.e., for about two-thirds of the year), they need to be amongst their constituents and not at the headquarters of Government It is in the constituency that they require facilities, office space, secretarial assistance, etc., rather

than family residences at the seats of Government. However, considering the housing problem in our capital cities what they, at the most, require is a moderate-size self-sufficient room where they can live while attending legislative business, and places where they can buy wholesome meals.

The provision of residential family accommodation as well as the non-provision of pension (or the tirade against such provision) have really tended to the same end, i.e., in making our legislators alienated from their own society. It is time that appropriate steps are devised to eliminate such alienation.

14

Towards an Appropriate System of Governance

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The problems which India faces are manifold. The Emergency period, and the years before that, which went into the making of the Emergency and the neglect of all else, have further multiplied and complicated them. Above all there is the problem of poverty. According to recent surveys some 40 per cent of Indians still exist below the level of mere subsistence. Their average per capita daily income, and many must be much below that, is computed in 1972-73 to be around 30 paisa per day. What this per capita really implies in terms of total consumption by the majority of our people may be better understood if we remember that today the cheapest cup of about 4-6 ounces of tea in the poorest of localities anywhere in India costs at least 15 paisa; that the price in a fair-price shop in Bihar of the poorest variety of (1) wheat is Rs. 1.30 per kg, (2) rice is Rs. 1.62 per kg, (3) sugar is Rs. 2.15 per kg (4) mustard-cum-rape seed oil Rs. 10 per kg (their retail market prices are said to be Rs. 1.55, Rs. 2.20, Rs. 4 and Rs. 17 respectively). Knowing the erratic supplies to the fair-price shops (whatever the reasons), their limited number and spread, and the lack of influence and weight amongst such poor, it may be assumed that most of them have little access to such shops and therefore if they purchase any of these commodities at all it is at the open market rate. Maize, perhaps a staple diet of many of the poor, but not a fair-price shop commodity in Bihar, sells at about Rs. 1.50 per kg.

This poverty has many causes. The basic causes are historical. Yet it may be added that, this poverty, as is commonly assumed, does not go back to prehistory, or dates back to the past thousand years. This poverty, in fact, is just about two centuries old. According to contemporary British accounts the wages of agricultural labour in the regions of eastern U.P. and

Bihar, even as late as 1800, when poverty was fast getting entrenched in this area, were, in real terms, somewhat higher than such wages in England. The life in this area consequently presented a different picture to what is generally assumed. According to William Hodges, a prominent British painter who travelled through eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar during 1781-83, "A surprising spirit of cleanliness is to be observed among the Hindoos: the streets of their villages are commonly swept and watered, and sand is frequently strewed before the doors of the houses."

The major ingredients of this poverty, which prevail even now, are the disruption of the rights of the actual cultivator of land, the mounting unemployment because of induced decline in rural industry as well as agriculture, the neglect of irrigation sources as well as of soil conservation practices, the denuding of forest land as well as the diminution of village common lands and arising from them the decline of the physical and the moral stamina of the affected people. Finally, the social disruption which resulted from British policies made these ingredients as seemingly normal attributes of the Indian scene and thus to be lived with forever. Further, the course of events has intertwined all these ingredients in such a manner that even to those who aspire to alter the situation, the problem has begun to look as if it is beyond the powers even of a Rama, or Krishna to untangle.

But poverty, and its amelioration, has been talked about for nearly a century, and much public resolves and plans made to eradicate it during the past three decades. Why is it that we don't seem to make, even a dent on it? But besides this poverty and its ingredients mentioned above, there is another ingredient in the situation. This is the ingredient of the administrative political structure which lays down and governs most of our public activity. It is not only its alien foundations and present-day irrelevance of its approach, procedures and rules, which make it (not necessarily deliberately but because of its constitution) our greatest stumbling block, but also its basic contrariness to our current aims that vitiates all that we attempt. This structure arose to satisfy British colonial requirements and was founded on the then prevailing British political and administrative concepts. During a century of getting the maximum out of the Indian countryside (irrespective of where this drain led, whether to Britain, or to the conquest of further areas, or to the Presidency towns, or to them all, is immaterial here), while at the same time keeping the Indians subdued and over-awed, this system assumed a life of its own.

Subsequently, while the concepts and the systems got altered in the ruler's own land (i.e., Great Britain), here it froze and has more or less remained in this state for nearly a century. By the beginning of this century it had become too heavy and cumbersome and practically useless even for British purposes. Hence the British ideas of decentralisation, the Montague Chelmsford reforms, and the post-1920 legislative and local level bodies. The Montague Chelmsford Reforms report observed: "Complaints were heard also that the prevalent unrest was due in part to loss of touch between officials and the people. The district officer was said to be too closely bound by rules and regulation; too much occupied in writing to his official superiors; too much of a machine and too little of a personality." As no fundamental changes were made at the existing centres of Governmental power, notwithstanding such insight, the reforms, which came in 1920, met the same fate as earlier or later British attempts at reform. The post-1947 years while greatly adding to the bulk, by the multiple increase in the departments of the Government as well as its personnel have merely added to its woodenness and frigidity.

But the above analysis and observations are nothing new. While many who run government (as ministers, Chief Ministers, Prime Ministers, or those who advise and assist them) may not be aware of the historical beginnings of the system, the utter futility of attempting to get anything new done is apparent to them. It is said that even senior ministers in Bihar feel (and possibly in other states and Delhi too) that if somehow the staffing of the secretariat headquarter departmental complexes could be reduced to one-third of the present strength they would begin to function to some purpose.

Many more similar ideas must occur to those who have been entrusted by the people with the running of Governments. But regrettably they are seemingly inhibited in getting such ideas properly formulated and deliberated upon and the agreed upon solutions duly enacted and put into execution. It is really sad that instead of determinedly acting to bring the functioning of Government to conform to the requirements of India and what is considered as the Indian concept of relevant Government even persons as high as the Indian Foreign Minister bemoan the woodenness of Governmental functioning and its corrupting influence on those who run it (Speech, Patna, Gandhi Maidan, Dec 3, 1977). While all Governments everywhere do become somewhat wooden and their incumbents somewhat insolent, the extremeness of such phenomena (or the mere harping on it) seems to be uniquely Indian.

The problems we face are neither God-given nor insurmountable. They are the consequence of previous political acts and therefore, given the necessary thought and will, are capable of being solved by political and allied means.

It is true that the endeavour required is great. Further human beings tend to be indolent and do not like to be disturbed even when the situation they are in is none too pleasing. In groups such a feeling is even more pronounced and the Governmental system is no exception. Those working for the Governmental machinery no doubt will feel anxious, even perturbed, by any unexplained alteration in the manner, or the place of their functioning. Even after explanation and realising the relevance and value of the alterations, to society as well as to themselves, some may still resist them. But today it is not only the ministers who feel suffocated and useless. A large section, perhaps an overwhelming section, of the administrative as well as the technical set-up experiences such suffocation and uselessness. Perhaps the ministers do have a practice of periodically visiting the various departments which function under them and discussing with them about the work they produce as well as the problems they face. If they have such personal acquaintance and dialogue with those who work under their charge, they must be aware that much of what they themselves feel is also shared by large sections of the Governmental establishment. If they already have no such acquaintance it is not too soon that they begin to be better acquainted with all that over which they preside.

One example of nearly total neglect is provided by the 250-300 headquarters staff of the statistical department of the Bihar Government. It is said that it neither has sufficient accommodation even to seat its personnel nor the proper tools to enable it to function to any purpose. Most of its library books are said to be lying tied in sacks for lack of space. One also hears of valuable equipment of all sorts, worth crores of rupees, lying rusting. The useless purchase of all types of things simply to avoid the lapse of departmental allocations every March 31 is too widespread and well known to require any illustration here. It is symptomatic of our tragic situation that even after 30 years we have failed to discover some device so that the balance or unspent resources in a department, or under a particular head, can betransferred from one financial year to the next and thus eliminate such colossal and mindless wastage.

To make the system purposive and to improvise alterations to achieve such an end it is not necessary to be punitive to individuals. What is

required is that the machinery of Government is reorganised according to some well thought out principles, appropriate rules and procedures laid down and the necessary resources and personnel provided to perform the assigned task. Resources or personnel should be allotted to areas which lack them; those which have a superfluity of either or both, should be left with only what is required; and whatever is found redundant (it may have been of great utility at some other period, quite possibly) shut down. With the tasks before us (full employment, literacy, health and social services) no one already in employment unless the person is wholly disruptive, need be turned out. Only people's assignment and the location of their work may need to be altered. For many, such change once adopted may be quite welcome. Yet, some, to begin with, may find it a real hardship. All this, of course, will require attending to. For instance, all those who are moved away from the secretariat complexes to district, taluka or village situations may be provided certain incentives (increased personal and family allowances, adequate medical facilities, help toward housing, honourable mention for adaptability to the new tasks, etc.). Those who show preference for working in their native districts, and in cases where such work as suits their individual capacities is available, should certainly have such preferences sympathetically considered. In fact, it is time we abandoned this colonial practice of forcing most government servants to work in areas far away from the areas in which they were born and bred, or of periodically transferring them from place to place. It seems that it is not only the system which is wooden, but our own minds have begun to conform to it too.

Once the need of major alterations in the system to solve the most pressing problems as well as to give ourselves a functioning polity is agreed upon, there may be several ways to bring it about. To start with the cabinet and ministerial committees themselves can decide upon more apparent and urgent alterations. Secondly, the Cabinet can ask such officers, who have competence in such matters, to draw up plans for needed alteration in the whole set-up or in particular departments. Thirdly, services of professional consultant bodies specialising in organisational matters can be invited to advise the government on the right organisation for the given task. Fourthly, and along with the above, the government perhaps should constitute a high-powered body with academic and administrative expertise as well as having an adequate awareness of the requirements of Indian society to examine the whole system of governance and suggest an alternate appropriate framework.

But it is not only the administrative structure which requires restructuring. The working of the legislative structure requires equal attention. For the past 30 years most of those elected, whether at the *gram panchayat* level or at the level of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, have felt themselves useless as well as frustrated. The existing in-built devices like provision of family accommodation for members of Parliament and State Legislatures in capital cities (unheard of in other countries of the Commonwealth at least) further alienates them from their home areas and adds to their sense of futility. How to make our Legislatures (or, for that matter *panchayats* etc.) more purposeful and their members near equal participants requires much thought. One possible device, amongst others, which may be worth considering is to divide the Legislature, for most of its deliberations, into several standing committees (or call them what one may) each of which is entrusted with the immediate responsibility (general supervision including attending to questions etc., formulation, processing and considering of new enactments etc.) of a particular ministry or ministries. Only at the final stages (like the third reading in the British House of Commons, there may be similar practices in many other countries) need the whole House consider any issue, or enactment.

The above is not to run down all that is being attempted, or planned for, by the Janata government. Further, while it requires no great proof to realise that the system we have is both irrelevant to our needs as well as immensely wasteful it must also be admitted that in their person most of the ministers (and the chief minister of Bihar more than others) and perhaps many of the administrators too, lead fairly simple lives. But personal virtue and simplicity desirable as they are, cannot in themselves solve the problems we face. These are basically problems of long impoverishment, and wholesale disorganization of our society which was kept in some sort of a straight-jacket by a relatively non-functioning and alien governmental system.

As most of our surplus resources as well as human talent is largely appropriated by this system, it becomes all the more imperative that before we can make any appreciable dent in the first two, this system must be so altered that it is aroused from its stupor, becomes conscious of its responsibilities, avoids waste as do many of its masters in their personal lives, and is geared to the performance of tasks which are expected from it. Today whatever little is achieved in the general sphere is after expending tremendous efforts. Though hard work and concern for personal problems are

valuable qualities in any ruler, they alone are not enough at least today. What we need much more is deeper deliberation and the questioning of all that we have begun to accept unthinkingly. It is this unthinking behaviour which is the major roadblock in our path.

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Let Us Stop to Think

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A curious story had been doing the rounds in New Delhi recently. According to it, the Prime Minister is supposed to have mentioned at a meeting of his colleagues, one does not know whether to frighten them or make them laugh, that while he personally did not believe such things it has been forecast that he is going to live another 20 years, that is, till he is 102 and that he is going to continue as Prime Minister of India for another eleven years, that is, till the age of 93. If we were not so despondent, as we are, (note Acharya J.B. Kripalani's observation: "It was a folly on my part to have agreed to assist in the selection of the Prime Minister last year"), such an observation, as Morarjibhai being destined to be Prime Minister for another eleven years, would have been to some a cause of rejoicing and to other an occasion for great laughter. Instead, it seems to strike terror, or deepen the agony, or give rise to derision.

But it is really not just Morarjibhai's or Chaudhury Charan Singh's or Babu Jagjivan Ram's fault that we are in the present state in which within 15 months a revolution, though incomplete, has turned sour and a substantial section of the people are unable to choose between Mrs. Indira Gandhi and the Janata regime. More than despondency and anguish, the need is for a review, an effort at understanding the conflict in what we want and the way we operate, the dichotomy in our thinking and our aims and what we can do about such a dichotomy.

The folly of March 1977 to which Kriplaniji refers is not a solitary event in recent Indian history. We seem to repeat such follies time and again. For nearly three centuries, perhaps longer, India seems to have moved from oppression to rebellion to revolution and then back to retiring within itself. The socio-political arena is left to the mercy of those to whom implementing the aim of the revolution is an anathema, either because of

their declining vigour, or their inherent preference for status quo or sheer stupidity.

Three outstanding examples of these are provided by the period of the Maratha-s (for it was the Marathas and their allies who ultimately lost India to the British and not, as is usually thought, the residual Muslim rulers of India), the period of the "transfer of power" from Britain to India and more recently the way things happened during the fateful few days after the people of India by their decisive verdict delivered their country and the disheartened leaders of the Janata party from the Emergency and the ruinous rule of Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

It is said that the March 1977 verdict was no revolution and that it was merely a negative vote against the excesses of the Emergency. It is a fashion in India to minimise everything in which the ordinary people ever play a part. It is said so of the British withdrawal that they, with the acquiescence of a tired, ageing leadership and an elite who had become virtual brown Englishmen, converted it into a mere "transfer of power". In fact the numerous other movements of passive resistance before and since Mahatma Gandhi, are similarly treated as just such negative verdicts, discontent about mere trifles, and not in any case falling in the category of revolution.

What is a revolution? According to the then contemporary British writings the replacement of Sirajuddowla by Mir Jafar in 1757 was a revolution. Historically, it did have far-reaching consequences for India as well as the world, no less than the long-term consequences in France of 1789, or in Russia of 1917.

Compared to the events of 1789 or of 1917 or of any other similar event which is termed a revolution, the movement for *Swaraj* under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi from 1920 onwards or the potential revolutionary situation in 1946 which compelled the British to take steps to withdraw from India (see The Transfer of Power Vol. VII, documents 442, 509, etc.), and even more so the upsurge of the ordinary people during February-March 1977, which ended the Emergency are revolutions par excellence. Never in history have such vast numbers, even when taken as percentages of the respective populations of the countries where the revolutions are said to have happened, ever participated in bringing down the regime against which they had rebelled. To call the March 1977 Indian verdict a negative vote is merely ridiculous.

Before we further indulge in such categorisation like the verdict of March 1977 being a "negative vote" etc., it will be worthwhile to get somewhat better acquainted with the background and objectives of the various revolutions in the world and then find out how they compare with events like those of February-March 1977 in India.

Undoubtedly, there are differences. Being relatively non-violent in their manners the process of discarding regimes by the Indian people has always been much less bloody than elsewhere. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi or under his all-pervading philosophy the events of the early 1940s or those of February-March 1977 have been practically bloodless. If the shedding of blood, or arson, or loot is what defines a revolution, then February-March 1977 and similar earlier events cannot be categorised as revolutions. But if the main element of a revolution is a tumbling down of the existing regime by the effort of the populace, then to that extent, in all these events, as far as any people could play a part, the people of India played it fully.

Therefore, the failure of February-March 1977, or of the movements of the early 1940s, or of 1857, and before that, of the defeat of the Maratha-s and others by British power lie with the Indian elite in either not having the skill to channelise popular support for purposes of victory or, when because of the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, or of a Jayaprakash Narayan, the hated regimes do get overthrown and victory comes, in merely grabbing power and opting for a continuation of the status quo. In a way it is thus also a failure of men like Gandhiji or Jayaprakash Narayan to have not fully understood the requirements of the period after the revolution and not preparing the right instruments, new frameworks, rules and personnel, which could have consolidated and extended what the people had delivered under their inspiration.

Why is it that such colossal follies are enacted in India time and again? There are perhaps deeper psychic reasons why Indians, while they are easily aroused, their protests, boycotts and *satyagraha-s* assume gigantic proportions more or less overnight, and having achieved their immediate goals, they also subside no less speedily. They resemble natural phenomena like storms or earthquakes. Only, they leave behind little destruction. And perhaps it is because they are easily satisfied by merely removing the apex of the ruling system while leaving the rest of the framework, though shaken but relatively intact, and retiring to private life, that every revolution in India ultimately turns sour.

Besides the deeper psychic causes, other causes also seem to be responsible for this Indian dichotomy. The other cause seems to be mental confusion of long duration where it has been assumed that the running of a society is no more than the running of an enlarged family. Thus the idea seems to have arisen that given virtuous individuals, everything will work out well in the social sphere and even the instruments of an evil situation will serve society. Perhaps such thinking is due to India's now fairly long unfamiliarity with social engineering and the running of the State. But it may be that for some deeper reasons or because of long sterility in the social and intellectual sphere the mind of India has atrophied. As the much maligned V.S. Naipaul observes: "The larger crises of India is of a wounded civilisation that is without the intellectual means to move ahead."

If India is ever to run its own affairs in a creative and innovative manner, and not just blindly tread the path laid down by two centuries of British rule, it must begin to discriminate between the varying elements which go into the making of a good man, a happy family and a well-managed society. Undoubtedly the basic virtues of Truth, Love and Compassion are essential in any relation between individuals. But these alone do not go into the making of a society. A society requires a complete infrastructure and appropriate norms to serve the purposes it has in view. The tragedy of India is that the social infrastructure as well as societal norms, fragile for centuries and later well-nigh destroyed by two centuries of European domination and the consequent depression and clash of alien and indigenous values, seem unable to be created anew.

It is not only the societal norms and the corresponding infrastructure which have been eroded. Though we continue to pay lip service, and increasingly more so in recent decades, to ancient prescriptions for the life of an individual, these in their application are seldom to be met. Otherwise, how does one explain one of the grossest violations of the much talked and admired prescription – the division of the individual's life into ashrams whereby life is divided into four stages of *brahmacarya*, *gruhastha*, *vanaprastha* and *sanyasa* . It is not merely the ignorant many who are a prey to such violation. The more vulgar manifestations of such a violation are there for all to see at the highest levels of our public life where dying in harness has seemingly become the supreme aim of an earthly existence.

Naturally, therefore, in the most populous democracy in the world today, on one hand one-third of its people are faced with absolute deprivation and hover on the brink of death by hunger and on the other, its great

leaders keep harping old, worn out cliches and borrowed conventional wisdom. When they do anything at all, it is concerned with somehow keeping themselves in seats of power or to look after the never-ending needs of their extended families and equally worn-out friends or display great filial piety towards their grown-up sons and their alleged misdeeds. India has in fact become a country of grownup juveniles. It is not only the grown-up sons of Prime Ministers, both past and present, and similar dignitaries who hang on to the apron-strings of then: powerful parents but even the otherwise capable leaders of India, who are in their forties and fifties, have reduced themselves to a similar state.

It is perhaps not really the sons of the great who are so much at fault. They are probably no worse than countless others of their age and opportunity. It is a vitiated sense of filial responsibility in our elders –whether because of memory of other tragedies in their personal lives and the fear of their repetition or because of the other psycho-biological causes in them - which is possibly at the root of such phenomena. In recent decades the elders in India, especially those holding authority in the socio-political sphere, because of some great sense of insecurity in them, have refused to allow those around them to grow up at all. The horror of it may only be realised when it is remembered that throughout history the heroes, scholars and the great in India achieved their highest before they were fifty and usually in their twenties and thirties. It is not only Gandhiji who wrote his greatest work Hind Swaraj before he was 40 and was acclaimed the Mahatma by the time he was 50. The same is true of Vivekananda, Aurobindo and to take figures of the past, of Adi Sankara, Ram and Krishna, Shivaji, Maharana Pratap and Akbar and even of Jawaharlal Nehru, whose highest point was when he first became the president of the Indian National Congress at the age of 40 and was entrusted to proclaim complete independence as the goal of India's freedom struggle.

More than anything else, even more than a program of full employment which is crying out for implementation for three decades, the first task before India is to devise ways and means whereby a faster flow is established in social and political life. It is true that because of the policies of the past three decades – one must thank Jawaharlal Nehru and the infantile behaviour of our other leaders for that – one or two generations of our political aspirants have been deprived satisfaction. But one cannot mortgage the future just to satisfy all those who were thus left on the side lines. To attempt to do so in March 1977 has been our most grievous folly.

In many other lands such problems are solved by the chopping of heads. But as we are a non-violent people, we need to urgently devise other ways whether through spiritual transcendence of the aggrieved or by bestowing on them all due honours and security short of entrusting them with the future of the country. In the latter field they can do nothing but harm. And enough harm has been done in the past 15 months. From hope, expectation and the desire for endeavour, we have been reduced to self-seeking or to a death-like stance.

If and when a faster flow happens in the socio-political sphere and a process of renewal starts by drawing the young into public life and entrusting them with responsibility to make functioning smoother, certain newer norms and arrangements even if they proved to be of temporary value need to be created. The first of them must be to make adequate and honourable arrangements for the well-being of those who voluntarily or otherwise, retire from public life. The current Indian notion, further strengthened by unthinking Gandhian support, that socio-political activity requires no recompense and certainly no pensions in retirement is an outmoded and dangerous dogma. Part of the reason for a whole lot of people sticking to political office (memberships of Legislatures, Ministerships, Chairmanships of committees, etc.) till decrepit mental or physical old age, largely arises from this dogma. So, does a major part of the money-making while in political office. Unless we take to chopping of heads, the provision of such care and various other incentives as honours conferred on retirement for eminent service are a must.

The relatively younger leaders of India may not necessarily be more efficient or virtuous than their elders. They may even be more quarrelsome. The imperativeness of the change is not merely to secure efficiency, harmony, etc., desirable though these are. The point is, and it must hold for all times, that the affairs of India need to be run according to current values and needs; that those who aspire to such honour and opportunity achieve it while they still retain some sensitivity and creativity and not when they have arrived at the brink of cynicism and despair, and total indifference to whatever does not touch their own person or peculiarities. Further, nothing is as corruptive and erodes the ethical and moral sense as being at the beck and call of such elders who have lost all sense of value and ethical purpose in the running of public life.

The second arrangement which will require to be made is that the widening gulf both in status and power between the Prime Minister and

the Chief Ministers of States has to be bridged. In a healthy polity they need to be treated as near equals not only to attract the more capable and powerful individuals back to the states, but also to reduce the great pressure on the post of the Prime Minister of India as it has come to be believed that a political aspirant can do nothing substantial till he becomes the Prime Minister. At least for the next few years it would in fact be beneficial for Indian politics as well as better administration and development that besides a Prime Minister, India has four to five deputy Prime Ministers who are individually entrusted with responsibility for each of the larger regions of India or are otherwise made co-equals of the Prime Minister in managing the affairs of the country. For a country of the size and problems of India the British or some other European model is of no value.

Till a new polity suited to the needs and genius of India can be framed, and this may take a long time, similar ad hoc arrangements need to be devised within the States too, for the more worthwhile functioning at the district levels. If districts cannot immediately be entrusted to elected bodies, bodies with power akin to those of State Legislatures, at least a minister of cabinet rank at the State level must be entrusted with the responsibility of the smooth functioning of all State activities within the district in his charge. The load at the secretariat level must be reduced to the minimum possible and most decisions allowed to be taken within the district itself. In fact, it is time that thought is given to the winding up of a large number of departments at the secretariat and state levels whose existence has neither any logic nor utility.

Whether it is the old Congress regime or that of the present Janata Party, for 30 years we have been harping on the same things and pledging ourselves to achieve them in certain specified periods. The usual magic number is 10 years. However, these 10 years never seem to end. This is not to deny that our industrial production in certain sectors has multiplied many times and even in agriculture it has almost doubled. But the numbers of hands and minds which work and depend on agriculture have increased similarly. And with easier transportation and the cash economy which has set in, the net result perhaps is that most of our people today have less nutrition and a more unbalanced diet in this age of welfare society and planning than they had before the onset of planning. Their housing, health, and their cultural life have fared little better.

During this same period, the standard of living of such people, numbering perhaps one, perhaps five or perhaps ten million, who inhabit about

500 square miles of what may be termed the 'civil lines' and the Metropolitan areas has multiplied manifold and a substantial portion of them have begun to live like their elite cousins in New York, Washington, London, Paris, Rome and Tokyo. In fact, their life is in a way easier, in that, they have a more pampered existence because of the number of domestics they can command in India.

Some of the objectives we have been long pledged to, include a total reform of the educational system; implementation of land reform with a view to rural harmony and greater agricultural productivity; adequate housing, clothing and food to all our people through full employment and transferring of greater resources to the long deprived areas where most of our people live; the arrangements for adequate health and civic services; and most urgent of all a speedy provision of clean drinking water in all our habitats. Even in the provision of this last item, we seem to be dragging our feet.

As Gandhiji said, for the hungry, "God can only appear in the form of bread." Yet perhaps a third of our people even today, day after day and year after year, go to bed on nearly an empty stomach. What greater shame there could be for a society, which swears by Truth, Non-violence and Peace, and where the land and nature have been so kind as in India. Instead, while we ourselves live in comfort and the sum total of our endeavours, real or imaginary, add to little more than nothing, when it comes to any concrete provision for the hungry and unemployed, we begin to have great moral qualms. We begin to be eloquent on the demoralising effects of unemployment benefits on those who receive them as if it was some unique, untested thing which we were being asked to undertake. We begin worrying about the consequences of such steps on the total economy, that it may reduce us to bankruptcy, that even if certain areas could afford such provision the rest may not be able to afford them. So even those areas which are able to, should not be allowed to provide some meagre relief to the unemployed. (With our long contact with Britain, on which we have modelled most of our coercive governing institutions, we do not perhaps know that even in the Britain of the 14th and 15th centuries, where society, by and large, was callous and the State allowed to do no more than the minimum, provision for poor relief was one of the duties of the State). A greater callousness or perversion of reason is unimaginable.

It is such inverted and vitiated reasoning which we are applying to practically every field. It is item for a pause, for reflection, for introspection, especially by the great and the far-seeing in our country.

When we reflect, we may find that we indeed erred grievously the way we went about arranging things the very moment the people of India gave us another chance to rebuild our country, to run it in a manner that it served some purpose in respect to its great and vast people. Instead, we seem to have wholly failed them. Not by design of course. But if all our leaders and thinkers and social workers put together could have been compared to Mahatma Gandhi, we inadvertently have committed what in Gandhiji's language be termed as a 'Himalayan blunder'. It is time for the great leaders of India, for Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan, for Acharya J.B. Kriplani and for the hundreds of others from Sarvodaya, social work, the Emergency resistance movement and those who are in power today to really begin an overdue introspection, to face the ugly truth of what has happened, how our idealism, as well as, will have been eroded and then to apply their mind to devise a solution of our basic issues, which will not only endure but begin to translate our aspirations, pledges and promises into concrete reality. In another year, perhaps even less, the whole situation would have wholly gone out of our hands. To talk to another Total Revolution then, will merely be playing with words.

16

Decentralisation Question Goes by Default[1]

[A Review of the report of the Ashok Mehta Committee on Panchayati Raj Institutions, 1978]

If for nothing else, the Ashok Mehta Committee on Panchayati Raj institutions deserves thanks for its promptitude in producing its report within eight months of its formation. Those who have other views on the subject, have thus not been kept hanging around too long. And if they so wanted, they could now give the nation the alternative view.

The Committee recommends a two-tier system of elected bodies, about 400 of them at the district level in each district of India and 40,000 of them at what it terms the *mandal level*, i.e., one each for a population of about 15,000-20,000. Besides, till the *mandal* bodies are formed and become functioning, the present block level bodies may continue to exist as non-statutory executive committees of the Zilla Parishad. There also is recommendation for village committees of such members as have been elected from the area to mandal and district bodies along with representatives of small and marginal farmers and of *mahila mandal-s*, *yuvak mandal-s* and voluntary agencies. A special obligation of this committee at the village level is "to organise two *gram sabha* meetings every year to explain to the people what programs the *mandal panchyata-s* are executing in their area and to channelise the people's feedback to the *mandal panchyata-s*."

The Committee recommends the de-linking of *nyaya panchyata-s*, where these exist, from the recommended structure which it significantly terms as "development *panchayats* ". Further, it supports participation of political parties in Panchayati Raj elections as such participation in its view "would ensure clearer orientation towards development programs and facilitate healthier linkage with higher level political process."

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[1]Published in *Panchayat Sandesh*, Sept-Oct 1978. pp. 15-16, New Delhi (a journal of the All India Panchayat Parishad).

Financially, the committee states that around Rs. 3,175 crore of State budgetary resources would be handled by the district and *mandal*institutions annually. Out of this, about 80 per cent will be directly spent by the district bodies, the remaining 20 per cent will be at the disposal of the 40,000 mandal institutions. What part of this seemingly vast resource will already be committed expenditure (in salaries of staff transferred for execution to those institutions and programs, which already form an integral part of state activity) and what will remain to them to initiate anything different and new, is however, not indicated. Any indication of what relation this seemingly vast amount bears to finances at the direct disposal of the central government, or the finances to be directly spent through the mechanism of State secretariats and departments was perhaps too much to expect from the Committee. Besides, the new institutions are strongly urged to raise additional sums through various new and old taxes including the over 150 year-old taxes on houses, professions, vehicles, etc. The return expected from such recommended local taxation steps, however, may not be too large. The amount expected from local remunerative assets is put at Rs.100 Crore.

The concern of the Committee with "development" and weaker sections is deep indeed. It is stated again and again in various contexts. Yet curiously there does not seem to be a single reference in its report to any idea of full employment and that it should become the responsibility of these Panchayati Raj institutions. As far as the Committee is concerned, the problem does not seem to exist. And that, notwithstanding the reference to 'Chaukhamba Raj' or the allusion to panchyata-s being the grassroots of democracy.

The committee states reluctantly that "in order to achieve requisite status as well as continued functioning... some provision in the Constitution deserves a careful consideration of the Government of India." Again, in another recommendation it suggests that "where strong traditional tribal organisations" are functioning, they may be allowed to continue to look after their social functions. Both these recommendations should be welcomed. But strangely it does not occur to the Committee that the latter idea could very usefully be extended to all the Panchayati Raj institutions whereby they are at least permitted to use the instrumentality of the institutions, without interference from any supervisory authority, to undertake by means of resources, contributions etc., raised by themselves to do things which the people in their areas wish them to do.

Notwithstanding its details, the laboured arguments, and the statistical annexures the report, overall, has rather a jaded look. In places even its sense of proportion seems to get lost. To take just a solitary example, in a world where from being majorities (USA, France, Germany, Japan, etc.) rural populations have dwindled to infinitesimal proportions in the last 50-60 years, the increase of urban population in India from 11.2 per cent in 1921 to 19.9 per cent in 1971, makes the Committee feel that "the pace of urbanisation in India has indeed been spectacular."

The structure and organisation of the State in India is more or less the same as just before independence. True, the number of persons who work for the State at local, state, and central levels, are several times more today than they were 30 years ago. The number of departments of government, public corporations, boards, etc. growing out of them are vastly greater today. Yet, not only during the period of the struggle for independence but even at the time of the making of the present Constitution, a great disquiet was felt by large number of the Constitution makers that what was emerging was not what they had striven for under the inspiration and leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. In fact on hearing what the Constitution was going to be like, Gandhiji had observed,

> "I must confess that I have not been able to follow the proceedings of the constituent assembly... (the correspondent) says that there is no mention of direction about village *panchayats* and decentralisation in the foreshadowed Constitution. It is certainly an omission calling for immediate attention if our independence is to reflect the people's voice. The greater the power of the *panchayats* the better for the people."[2]

It was such observation by Gandhiji and the great disquiet of the members of the Constituent Assembly expressed through the assembly's president Dr. Rajendra Prasad, that made the constitutional advisor of the Government of India, Sri. B.N. Rau, say in May 1948 that, "It may not be easy to work the *panchayat* idea into the draft Constitution at the present stage." Even otherwise, B.N. Rau and others including members of the Constitution Drafting Committee whose child the present Constitution essentially is, had little interest in matters like the *panchayats* or a decentralised system. Finally, as an afterthought, a new Article (the present Article 40) was inserted in the Constitution as a sort of a sop, a consolation

[2]In Harijan. Dec. 21, 1947.

prize, and it says, "The State shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government." Feeling that this will ultimately lead to what they had been seeking – a structure arising from the village upwards where only what could not appropriately be done at the more local levels, will be transferred as residual functions, power and resources to the next higher levels – the members of the Constituent assembly rather sorrowfully acquiesced in this compromise. But in spite of all efforts since then, notwithstanding the report of the Balwant Ray Mehta study team and other similar groups, the various seminars and conferences held under a variety of auspices and the great movement for Bhoodan and Gramdan and its emphasis on strengthening village communities, what essentially prevails is the pre-1947 system. In the words of Sri Jayaparkash Narayan what we still have is not a system having its roots in the ground and drawing its sustenance from its primary units but an 'inverted pyramid'.

Obviously, there are two main and opposite views on the organisation of the State. One is the predominantly western view, most extensively theorised and practiced in Great Britain from the times of the Norman conquest of Britain to the nineteenth century, whereby all authority and resources vest in the conqueror and all else, especially the lowest levels, exist at his behest. The model which the British erected in India is thus structured on this British elitist concept of the State. The reverse model is that advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, and by and large indigenous to India. In this model the State is merely the apex of a very wide based structure which has historically directly commanded most of the resources and the base is not at the mercy of the apex, as in the western model. Most of the functions of civilised society in this indigenous model were decided upon and performed locally. In it the apex and the intermediate levels attended to only those functions which could not be adequately attended to at the level of the local communities or smaller groups among them.

Both models have their advocates and detractors. According to some, the 'inverted pyramid' model is conducive to greater military strength, modern industrialisation etc. According to the others, the decentralised model leads to a participatory system, face to face relationships, and for the ordinary citizen, a life of greater fulfilment. Further, according to this view there is little chance of building a democratic system in India unless the ordinary citizens of India in their hamlets, villages, mohalla-s or small towns are enabled to participate firstly, in the management of what prima-

rily concerns them, and secondly, in their feeling that the larger polity of which they are an integral part, is according to the ideas they value and that the idiom of the larger polity is not too dissimilar to their own.

The movement of 1974-75 led by Jayaprakash Narayan, the promises of the manifesto of the Janata Party and the manner in which the people had decisively responded to J.R's call during Feb-March 1977, had made people believe that at long last the governing of India will proceed on a more relevant and meaningful basis. The appointment of the committee headed by Sri Ashok Mehta in December 1977 therefore appeared like an appropriate first step in this direction. But what the committee has produced, is little different from what has gone on in the three decades since independence. Instead of a new beginning, it is a rehash of the recommendations of the COPP team, the arid reports of the Administrative Reforms Commission and similar other trivia. The question of real decentralisation, of the creation of an institutional framework for self-government as well as development according to local needs, talents and ideas has again gone by default.

17

The Question of India's Development

[Talk given at Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, January 1983]

Much disquiet was expressed earlier this month by several distinguished scientists at the Indian Science Congress at Tirupati on the recent technology policy statement of the Government of India. According to one of them, "We have outmoded science being taught (to those taking graduate degrees), experiments in some cases are 40 years old." Another scientist said that in the past 35 years, he had seen many statements on science policy but none have been implemented. According to him, "I am concerned with the advancement of science for the benefit of our people. There are files and channels and all that these lead to is nothing but more files." According to yet another scientist the view of most of those in authority to any new innovation was: "Has it been tried out anywhere? There is no encouragement for new ideas. Only if the West has done it, they will support it. Otherwise, they will not." The President of the Indian Science News Association said that the new policy was: "A mere statement of wishful thinking."[1] According to Dr. Y. Nayudamma, till recently also the Vice-chancellor of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, "The present educational system modelled on the western pattern has neither produced the right type of manpower nor improved the education of the masses. Neglect of traditional technologies and local skills had undermined local confidence and affected the ability of technologists to tackle grass-root problems."[2]

At another meeting about this time an even more distinguished person, and one very close to the centre of political and administrative power, expressed the view that the present judicial process was "too wooden, antideluvian, too slow and too expensive to protect the interest of the citizen". While expressing the view that it was no use saying that the Indian

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[1]Report in *Indian Express*, Madras, January 10, 1983.
[2]Report in *The Hindu*, Madras, January 10, 1983.

Constitution was imperfect, he suggested that "We must now give ourselves the institutions which will withstand the strains inherent in our society, which ordinary leadership cannot handle." The major new change, which he had to recommend, was: "A system of indirect election coupled with proportional representation in elections to the legislatures. The direct elections should be only to the *panchayats* or notified area committees or municipalities or corporations. Next in the system would be the District or Zilla Boards which would elect the State Legislatures. The State Legislatures would elect the lower house of the Central Legislature."[3]

Yet just two months ago India had played host to the Asiad 1982. It is true that the preparation for it had gone on for three or four years and that fabulous amounts, estimated varying between Rs. 80 crores to Rs. 1,200 crores are said to have been spent on preparing the metropolis of Delhi for them. Further, as it turned out, it was not India which scored high on the medals tally, but rather the countries of East Asia, especially the Republic of China, and the two Koreas. That Japan also ranked high on the medals tally, was not unexpected. Though India did not do well in the games them-

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[3] *The Hindu*, Madras, January 11,1983; report of the Rajaji birthday lecture at Bangalore by Sri B.K. Nehru, currently Governor of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It may be mentioned here that there was a rather heated and anguished debate in the Constituent Assembly during November 1948 on the place of the village in India's Constitution. The draft Constitution prepared by a committee of lawyers, of whom except one the rest took little part in the actual deliberations of the drafting committee, satisfied few members and the opinion was generally expressed that the draft was alien to Indian ideas and members wondered for whose benefit was it intended? Shri T. Prakasam asked, "Is it for the benefit of a few people or is it for the benefit of the millions of people who pay taxes?" According to others, "The Gandhian and the Congress outlook has been that the future Constitution of India would be a pyramid structure and its basis would be the village pancayats." Even according to Shri K. Santhanam who at this stage acted as a sort of mediator between the members and the drafting committee, the existence of village pancayats, "may have to be recognised in the Constitution for, in the long run, local autonomy for each village must constitute the basic framework for the future freedom of this country." For a multiplicity of reasons, one of them was said to be that it was too late then to alter the basic draft, but largely, perhaps, because of the seeming coolness, indifference, or hostility of men like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and possibly even of Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel (both of whom kept silent throughout this debate) the only thing which was done to pacify the members of the Constituent Assembly was to enact an additional Article (present Article 40) requiring the State "to take steps to organise village pancayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government." For a text of this discussion see Panchayat Raj as the Basis of Indian Polity: An Exploration into the Proceedings of the Constituent Assembly, Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development (AVARD), New Delhi, 1962.

selves, it is generally acclaimed that the organisation we had put up, the technology and the skills which had gone into the long preparation, the orderly flow of traffic, and even the courtesy shown to ordinary Indian pedestrians by the dispensers of law and order during the weeks of the games were comparable with arrangements at similar occasions in what is known as the developed world.[4]

Similar other instances of India's achievements in several other fields can be cited, and most of these may be said to derive from the process of planning and development launched in India in March 1950 by the setting up of the First Planning Commission. However, for over two decades now, and much more so in recent years a disquiet has set in India about the results of such planned development, not only of its great inadequacy in relation to need, but even more so, whether what has so far resulted from such national effort was sought by India during its freedom movement in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.

II

To appreciate the achievement of planned development or even the nature of the disquiet, it is perhaps necessary to go back a little into India's recent past. Till 1929 the declared aspiration of the Indian national movement had been the achievement of some sort of a parity within the then British political system. But in December 1929, the Indian National Congress opted for the achievement of complete independence from Britain. The Pledge of Independence drafted by Mahatma Gandhi in January 1930 stated:

> "We believe that it is the inalienable right of the Indian people, as of any other people, to have freedom and to enjoy the fruits of their toil and have the necessities of life so that they may have full opportunities of growth. We believe also, that if any government deprives a people of these rights and oppresses them, the people have a further right to alter it or to abolish it. The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the mass-

[4]It is to be hoped that those competent to do so are analysing the various benefits which may have accrued to India because of the holding of the Asiad. The benefits must concern many areas including technology, international trade, greater Indian standing in world affairs, etc. Equally important is to know the effect the games have had on the sports consciousness of India's ordinary children (especially sports involving gymnastics and physical culture).

> es, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually. We believe therefore that India must sever the British connection and attain *purna swaraj* or complete independence."[5]

The point that India had been ruined by the British economically, politically, culturally, and spiritually and that only in full freedom the people of India "may have full opportunities of growth" was to an extent reaffirmed in the Constitution which India gave to itself in January 1950. It pledged to secure to all its citizens:

> "JUSTICE, social, economic and political;
>
> LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faithand worship;
>
> EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all
>
> FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the Nation."[6]

And it was in pursuance of such ideas and pledges that the Government of India resolution of March 1950 setting up the First Planning Commission stated:

> "The Constitution of India has guaranteed certain Fundamental Rights to the citizens of India and enunciated certain Directive Principles of State policy, in particular, that the state shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life, and shall direct its policy towards securing, among other things:
>
> -that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood;
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> -that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the com mon good; and
>
> -that the operation of the economic system does not result in

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[5]*Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG), Vol. 42, pp.427. Till this time, and even after he formally ceased to be a nominal member of the Congress in 1934, all such substantial documents and resolutions used to be drafted by Gandhiji himself.

[6]Constitution of India: Preamble.

> the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment."[7]

But it appears and is confirmed by the trends and events of the past three decades, that though the essential phraseology of the 1930 Independence Pledge was to an extent incorporated in the Constitution and became the directing ideas of India's planned development, it was in effect not taken very seriously, especially by many of those in positions of leadership in the Indian National Congress, or in the post-independence Government in Delhi. To them the pledge was perhaps merely rhetorical and did not represent a statement of previous reality or of future objectives. It is true that the observation that India as a nation had been ruined politically and economically, was largely subscribed to, But the statement that it had been ruined culturally and spiritually, implying that its society had been deformed and disoriented, and its ordinary people greatly deprived of their dignity and initiative did not seem to have had any appreciable impact on the thinking and action of those who began to rule India from August 1947 onwards. Somehow, they (and these really included practically every section of the privileged in India whatever ideologies they may have subscribed to) seem to have been too dazzled by the world surrounding them. Further, the social and economic theories which formed the groundwork of their thought and the histories that they had read (all of these largely having their origin in the West especially the English-speaking areas) seemed to hold them in a sort of spell. Even as late as December 1953, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru believed that: "Nothing in the world's history in the previous 2,000 years was so powerful in changing human life as the Industrial Revolution and what followed in its wake." He of course also thought of taking "the vast masses of the people into confidence" regarding the venture he had in view and observed "one has to produce a sensation in them that they are partners in the vast undertaking of running of a nation, partners in Government, partners in industry."[8] Some half-hearted attempts at such participation were even tried through diverse programs like Panchayati Raj, etc. But these plans and programs structured as these were like the rest of the system naturally soon met the same impasse. Whether it was mere governance or development – the latter having some room for physical investments or physical contributions of the people etc. – we were

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[7]The First Five Year Plan, December 1952, Introduction.

[8]Jawahar Lal Nehru: Speeches, Vol. 3, pp. 59-60, "Bullock Cart, Motor Lorry, Jet Plane", published 1958.

in no way able to devise any paths whereby the 360 million Indians[9] could publicly apply their own minds and talents to what they considered worthwhile and to whatever they wished to create. That the new scientific laboratories and the great scientists who directed and manned them had no time for the pressing problems of the ordinary people at least in the 1950s is fairly well known. In a certain sense the people were thrust back to the year 1915 when the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi had bought them back to public life. We more or less seemed to have assumed, as many well-wishing foreign friends of India also did and still do, that these ordinary people of India though they may be able to contribute in programs requiring muscular strength or some mechanical repetition they had no longer the ability to be creative either organisationally, or technically, and that in fact their mental faculties had wholly vanished.[10]

III

If one is to go by public utterances as well as by private reflections of those who in one way or another have been managing the affairs of India it seems that the burden of their task has become too much for them. The often-broadcast statement on the All India Radio (before the 8 a.m. News bulletin, and perhaps at other times too), that the population of India was so much in 1921, that it is so much now, and that it may become so much in the year 2001, and that the listeners should reflect about the consequences of such a great 'tragedy', and the tone in which it is voiced, is merely symptomatic of their sense of an unbearable burden.

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[9]Ibid., pp. 4-7, on 13.10.1954 Pandit Nehru titled his speech as "Three Hundred and Sixty Million Problems".

[10]It may be mentioned that notwithstanding the powerful current of modernisation which swept over India especially from 1950 onwards there were still various groups and eminent individuals (like Acharya Vinoba Bhave, Shri Jayaprakash Narayan, Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia to name only a few) who expressed great public reservations on what had been initiated by those in power in Delhi. Several groups, especially the Socialists, also talked of the need of the small machine (perhaps implying a technology which was appropriate to India and which could evolve from its own indigenous tools, implements, and know-how), of more suitable political formations expressed by phrases like "the four-pillar state", and of a vast land-army of youth for long term social and constructive service. The Sarvodaya movement also came up with the idea of the grama-sabha of the whole village, of the village community, and of lokasakti sustaining Indian polity. But by and large most such ideas were rather vague and muted. A basic document which appeared in 1958 was A Plea for the Reconstruction of Indian Polity by Jayaprakash Narayan.

Having taken it for granted, on the basis of what the West popularised about itself, that the history of European man and his aspirations and theorisations had some universal validity, we also seem to have assumed that we were also capable of repeating what the West had done in the past 1,000 years of its history. The images we had of Western man were either of the individual plunderer of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, or the Western man of the twentieth century – sophisticated, polished, considerate, charitable, and at least theoretically, advocating equality and fraternity amongst all men. We did not seem to have realized that there was much more to these images and that the Western man had grown out of beliefs and philosophies which, though appearing with soft exteriors, had a hard core and the present general prosperity and welfarism of the West was hardly half a century old. In fact, it is worth considering whether the current prosperity and welfarism of the West is a direct product of such Western pursuit, or whether it is essentially an indirect fallout of pursuits which had wholly different purposes in view. We did not realise that to reach this present dazzling stage the West had to be harsh, cruel, exploitative, etc., not only to the non-Western world but to its own people for many centuries. The supposition that the West has arrived at its present democratic and welfare arrangements because these had been in-built in its medieval and early modern society is as much a myth as the supposition that the people of India led impoverished and politically oppressed lives for thousands of years.

That even around 1800, when much of Indian society had been disrupted and subdued by European political power, life in most parts of India was on the whole more equitable, more literate, and that its ordinary labourers seemed to have had substantially larger real wages than say ordinary people in Britain may be known to many scholars specialising in this period.[11] That Indian agricultural productivity was much higher, that its

[11] According to Thomas Munro, the per capita consumption pattern of the high, middle and lower groups in the district of Bellary in 1805, was in the proportion of 17:9:7. Further, according to a Madras Presidency indigenous education survey (A.D. 1822-25), a quarter of the school-age boys were then receiving education in about 12,000 schools in the Presidency. Additionally, a substantial number were also said to be educated at home (in the case of Madras city where an enumeration was made the number of those receiving education at home was about four times the number of those going to school). In the Tamil-speaking areas the proportion of boys in the schools from the sudra-s and castes below them was of the order of 70 per cent to 80 per cent of the total boys in the schools. According to the *Edinburgh Review*, 1804, the wages of the Indian agricultural labourer around 1800 was in real terms substantially higher than the wages of agricultural labour in Britain.

steel was far superior and was produced in most areas of the country, that some of its agricultural implements, like the drill plough, were far more effective than such things in the Britain of 1800 is now well known and acknowledged.[12] But, perhaps, because of some lethargy in our minds, those of us who manage this country are reluctant to re-examine our premises – whether about political organisation, or about development, or theories of education or of history or of science – that we are still clinging to for the past 35 years, or more. Perhaps we are afraid that the moment we begin any such questioning, what has kept us going so far, may crash like a castle built on sand, a structure which has no real foundation not being supported either by Indian experience or the psyche and priorities of India's people.

IV

Any discussion about "perspectives on India's development" is thus faced with a big question mark. Not that the planned development which has been going on over the past 30 years has not added to India's strength as a nation, has not made it somewhat more confident and has not created a large number of competent professionals and specialists in various fields. Further, it has also added varying quantitative increases both in industrial production as well as in agriculture. But simultaneously the same process has also created immense problems of large-scale deforestation, of soil erosion, the ever – increasing floods and droughts, to the greater poisoning of the environment and instead of creating a more aesthetic and ordered life, has in fact made ordinary life more precarious, more insecure, and certainly far uglier. It perhaps will not be far wrong to say that even the life in our towns, cities and metropolises, excepting a few hundred square miles of the metropolitan and civil line areas, the rest has degraded in every sense during the last three decades, and most of these places are fast approaching the state of a vast slum. In contrast the villages of India, which at times evoke the concern of our elite, despite the great impoverishment and absence of even basic public amenities, which characterise large numbers of them, are in comparison still havens of order and habitability. That the towns, cities and metropolises where most of India's resources are spent have been

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[12]Again, according to the *Edinburgh Review*, while the seed rate for wheat, etc., was the same in Britain as in India the productivity in India was three times higher. An account of some aspects of Indian technology around 1800 is given in Dharampal: *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century: Some Contemporary European Accounts*, Impex India, New Delhi, 1971.

reduced to such a state may not, according to some, be the direct result of planning itself. But such a state has certainly resulted from the fact that those who manage such things have been led to unthinking behaviour, to abandon creativity, and have stopped to exercise their mind. And the people for whom they are supposed to work, do not even have the least say in what these people do. The designs of most of our modern houses especially those built for the ordinary and the middle level people, or the hostels, guest houses etc., by their general ugliness and discomfort, bear testimony that our planners and developers have indeed abandoned all reason. That even our private residences, hostels, hotels etc., continue to proliferate with western type toilets – which only a rare Indian can use with any ease – is in a sense representative of the alien foundation and morphology of most of our development. Even if the people's ease did not matter, the very fact that the European type toilet requires much more water to flush – and water by and large is a relatively scarce commodity in this country – should have stopped its installation if the matter had been given any thought at all.[13]

Many of us may believe, as Karl Marx and many before him and since then did, that India has to become Western before it can be termed civilised. To the extent it was within our capacities, we have tried this experiment. Firstly, by framing India's Constitution largely according to Western ideas and practices, secondly by keeping and further proliferating the administrative system which the British had created basically during 1770-1830 for the administration of a conquered territory, and thirdly by the way we have formulated our planned development and scientific endeavour where the planners are the creators, directors, and the givers and the people of India, the supposed beneficiaries. The results though not exactly dismal are not such that we could claim that we are on the way to achieve a Western type of society. It may be that about half a million Indian homes

[13]Dr. D. S. Kothari, our great scientist and educationist, once told the writer of this paper that around 1940 when the residences of the academics of the Delhi University were built they were much perturbed by the fact that the residences were going to have western type of toilets. The architects, etc., to whom they talked, told them that they on their own could not alter the design, and that only Sir Maurice Gwyer, the Vice-chancellor, could do anything in the matter, i.e., install Indian style toilets instead of the western type. Finally, Dr. Kothari met Sir Maurice on behalf of the academics. While Sir Maurice probably did not like such a representation, he agreed to meet them halfway. What he agreed to was that in the residences which were still to be built, those residences which were to have two toilets would now have one Indian style toilet and one western type but those which were to have one toilet (that is residences meant for junior academics) would have the European type of toilet only.

today have television sets, refrigerators, gas or electric cooking-ranges, perhaps about a million cars, and the like. But according to similar sources about half the population of India lives below the 'poverty line' and, most above it, spend hours and hours queuing for transport, milk, sugar, kerosene oil, food, etc.

The best that can be said for the past 30 years, is that it has kept India going so far, and it is possible that with any luck we can continue to survive this way for some more time.

V

But the path that we have chosen, while it may possibly keep India intact as a political entity, seems to hold little possibility of meeting even the basic requirements of the ordinary Indian, i.e. of some 95 per cent of India's population. Worse still, it has made the Indian citizen much more dependent, even the agricultural peasant of today is said to have become less creative and innovative in relation to the new hybrid agriculture and its requirements, and his own creativity and innovative skills are now getting perhaps even more stunted than they were at the onset of British rule. Such a situation creates a dilemma for India, wherein on the one hand, centralism is incapable of providing food, shelter and clothing, let alone welfarism, for the great majority of the people, and on the other hand, by appropriating and monopolising all resources and organisational structures, it becomes an obstacle in the way of people fending for themselves. There must be a way out of this if India is to survive as a civilised society. That the ordinary Indian peasant has, by and large, provided India with sufficient food, even when his capacity for investment in his fields had reached the lowest point during the nineteenth and early twentieth century and his tools and animal stock had deteriorated a great deal, is illustrative enough of his talent and capacity. The same holds true of the Indian artisan.

Being relatively a mild people, and having been suppressed, ridiculed, and ground down for several generations, and more or less prohibited from public activity the people of India had, by and large, retired within their shells during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Not that they did not feel the injustice and unfairness of it all. As someone mentioned to Gandhiji in March 1944 that, till his emergence on the Indian scene even men like Sir Pherozshah Mehta used to be meek and humble when addressing the British. Gandhiji agreed that such was the position till about 1915 but added, "That what he himself had begun to voice was what

people had felt in their hearts but were not able to voice it themselves." From 1916 onwards, for 30 years, he was thus their spokesman, praising them as well as chiding them as he considered necessary. But, unfortunately, those who succeeded him, especially as managers of independent India, returned to the behaviour pattern of the British days. (Why they did so is perhaps best left to *psycho-analysis*, or perhaps because their British education and training had greater hold on them than their days with Gandhiji). Impressed as they were by the West – whether it was the Soviet Union, or the USA, or the beginning of the European industrial revolution, in this context, they are the same – everything in India to them seemed primitive, parochial, steeped in superstition, etc. According to their thinking – it is possible that such a view has seldom been voiced publicly in so many words – the people of India were in fact an obstacle in what they considered as the 'March of India', and the further these people stayed away from the field of decision and action, except as hewers of wood and drawers of water or at times to provide some decorative trimming to this and that, the better for the India of their vision. Nobody seemed to have remembered that it is these very people who had kept India going with the lowest possible capital investment, and tools and livestock which had also been worked down to skeletal forms like themselves. Instead of praise and approbation they were virtually told that they were rather worthless. Having rejected the ordinary Indian people, it is no wonder that the problems of governance and development have become such a burden to the Indian elite.

It is possible that the suggestions Gandhiji had for the running of India after independence, which he tried to spell out in his long letter of October 5, 1945 to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, [14] and later in his concept of the oceanic circle,[15] did not quite provide the solutions which India required in the conditions of 1946-47. But Gandhiji's civilisational analysis of India as well as of the West as also his understanding of his people, the moral idea which they cherished and which sustained them, has been incomparable and may be said to be as valid today as it was some 60 to 70

[14]CWMG, Vol. 81, pp. 319-21. In this letter, written after a meeting of the Congress Working Committee, Gandhiji had stated he still fully stood "by the kind of governance I have described in Hind Swaraj'." He further added that, "The sum and substance of what I want to say is that the individual person should have control over the things that are necessary for the sustenance of life."

[15]Harijan, 28.7.1946, pp. 236-7, article titled "Independence". In it Mahatma Gandhi had visualised Swaraj democracy to be "an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages,

years ago.[16] For, it is only in the awakening of the creative and innovative effort of the many – that is of those who actually are given to impoverishment, to large-scale deprivation, and to the loss of dignity – that a solution to the problem of development can be found. Development after all basically implies "growth from within" and "to unfold itself, grow from a germ: to grow into a fuller, higher, or mature condition." So, by definition itself, development would only begin to take place when the people of India are enabled to develop themselves, i.e., when they as individuals as well as parts of groups, can begin to blossom out.

VI

That the approaches, tools, and methodology which have run India's affairs since independence are no longer able to perform what is required, i.e. to reduce poverty appreciably and bring back some dignity and initiative to the ordinary Indian, is not to condemn such approaches, etc. In post-1947 India, particularly as it developed from about 1945 onwards, the elite especially the administrators and the economists did do whatever was within their competence. That this performance has ultimately led to a few hundred oases and enclaves of great prosperity and Western modes of thought and behaviour in the midst of an ocean of want, impoverishment, and dependence and much more to a breakdown of all moral behaviour and norms need not exactly be placed only at their door. But for the health and survival of India, it has to be admitted that such approaches are no longer relevant and are in fact destructive of the very fabric of Indian society. Under such circumstances the Indian political system, and thoughtful Indians in all spheres of life, have to look for ways and means which while preserving the integrity of the nation at the same time provide freedom, opportunity, as well as proportional national resources which enable people at various levels to begin to take care of the more urgent and basic problems of living.

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till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their approach but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units." Further, in this view, "In this structure composed of innumerable villages (and obviously towns and cities), there will be ever widening but never ascending circles" and "the outermost circumstances (meaning the State) will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength" from them.

[16]Gandhiji's civilisational analysis was first presented in 1909 in *Hind Swaraj*. It is in the form of questions and answers, and in it Gandhiji also spelt out the sort of state and society which he visualised for a free India.

The fact that now we have had 35 years' experience in managing the affairs of India, that now we also have a more realistic acquaintance of the international world, and perhaps, are less dazzled by the achievements of the Industrial Revolution may make it more practical for us to create the necessary new ways and means. While it is true that on the one hand our problems are more pressing and complex than they were 35 years ago, on the other hand a far larger number of our young people now have much greater intellectual and professional competence, and perhaps also, will, judgement and originality to attend to the alterations and changes which we require. Keeping in view that even if we wished we cannot at one stroke isolate ourselves from the pressures of the world it may be that for a time we will have to operate in two separate ways, one way to deal with the outside pressures and links, and the other being in tune with our moral and social values. This will require generating participation and creativity to deal with the routine of life and within a decade or two restoring our society to full health. But even such a compromise will require the abandoning of the five-star culture by all and at least for a few decades all of us would have to approximate much more in most respects to the life of a villager's cottage. That similar efforts have been tried in other societies, and with considerable success, is well known.

It is possible that in decades to come, India may on its own opt for some form of what is known as modernisation and the science and technology which will then be appropriate to it. The grievous error of the Indian planner and his masters and inspirers has been that they tried to behave like gods (or in modern imagery like the great white man who is said to have come laden with gifts for the savages of the world) and bring the boon of planning and development to the people whom they considered as their worshippers. As he was neither a God, nor the great white sahib, no wonder things turned out as they have. It is perhaps time that we now apply the approach of science as well as of common sense to move from the present rather stark reality, step by step, as Mahatma Gandhi used to do, and be assured that every step we take is on firm ground and serves the purpose it had in view. Once our society becomes functioning, i.e. when its outputs are not the mere results of physical inputs but much more of creativity and ingenuity, then there will be time enough to debate such abstract issues as scientific temper or moksa.

18

Some Ideas on the Reindustrialization of India

[Unpublished: Written in 1990-91. Slightly expanded in 1999]

The proportion of the Indian people engaged in industry as distinguished from agriculture, cattle and animal breeding, trade and commerce, cultural and religious pursuits, administration, and police and militia till about the end of the eighteenth century was probably in the range of 20 to 25 per cent. Of these a substantial proportion were occupied in the construction of houses, temples, forts and other public buildings, and in the construction of tanks and roads. The materials used in construction activity would have included stone, baked bricks, mud, various types of tiles, wood, some metal and a variety of mortars. Even a larger proportion seems to have been occupied in the various processes related to the manufacture of cloth –ginning, carding, spinning, weaving, dyeing, printing, finishing, etc. The number of weavers in India around 1800 could well have been in the range of 15-20 lakh families, and the households which would have spun the cotton, woollen or silken thread for the cloth which was woven could easily have been ten times the number of weaver families. Besides these two, the major areas of industrial activity would have been in the mining and manufacture of metals. the conversion and shaping of metals into consumer articles, in the preparation of chemicals including the manufacture of salt as also of saltpetre; fishing in inland rivers, lakes, tanks, ponds, etc., as well as in the sea; in the collection of herbs including plants used in the making of dyes and of agents which fixed the colour as well as the manufacture of sugar, spirits, medicines, herbal delicacies, and essences, etc.; and a multiplicity of craftsmen who worked in wood, iron, silver, gold, diamonds, copper, brass, bronze, glass, etc. Besides there were the oil extractors, potters, leather workers and so on.

Till the end of the eighteenth century, those engaged in industrial pursuits, especially those in the various fields of construction and those engaged in the manufacture and shaping of metals considered themselves in no way inferior to the *brahmins* either in learning or in ritual status, especially in south India. And even the *brahmins* would concede them precedence on many occasions. Yet it does seem that because of alien political dominance, or because of some internal tension between those engaged in industry, on the one hand, and those engaged in agriculture, on the other, or because of a combination of these and several other factors, the status of those engaged in industry, and even in trade, commerce and banking, seems to have started to suffer by the early eighteenth century. The oft-repeated prominence given to the alleged contribution of European and other foreign craftsmen, designers, etc., in the construction of many structures including the Tirumal Naick Palace in Madurai or in the construction of astronomical observatories, etc., of Sawai Jaisingh of Jaipur (Rajasthan), seems to be indicative of the declining status of those running Indian industry.

The nineteenth century sees the extensive uprooting, disruption and stagnation of all spheres of Indian industry and the large-scale conversion of those who had been historically and traditionally engaged in them, into mere labourers, and often into a destitute population. In a way this was a replay of that which had been happening to the craftsmen of England, and increasingly of other areas of western Europe, since about 1750, and more so, after the availability of the energy produced by coal and steam. Yet after their initial uprooting and displacement most of England's craftsmen gradually got absorbed into the new industrial structure and as time went on, most of those engaged in agriculture and other occupations were also taken into the new power-driven industry. Further, many of the craftsmen of England and those of Western Europe, entered into the new industrial structure as its master craftsmen, designers, supervisors, trainers, etc., and not merely as labourers doing the hard, menial and unpleasant jobs.

In India the process of uprooting, disruption, etc. planned as it was by the British-run Indian State to suit the needs of England and of those of the West generally and of the newly transformed western trade and commerce, got directed differently. Initially, the craftsmen, especially those engaged in the making of cloth, in the mining and manufacture of metals, and those engaged in construction, stonework, etc., were through fiscal and other devices reduced to a state of penury and homelessness and led into

either a state of bondage or destruction. This turned most of the technological and industrial innovators, designers and craftsmen into mere labourers, and most of the remaining were reduced – because of lack of resources and lack of demand – to a state of industrial crudity and barbarism. Mining and the manufacture of metals were either directly prohibited by administrative regulations or made economically impossible by the levy of high license fees, take-over of mining land as well as forests by the State as its property, and through the import of tariff supported British and European products into the country. The same began to happen from about 1815 in all sectors of the cloth industry from the stage of carding, spinning, dyeing, weaving, to printing and finishing. By about 1820 Indian industry was wholly on its knees and in the sort of state in which Mahatma Gandhi found it around 1915.

From about 1800 onwards the condition of those engaged in industry had become pitiful in the major industrial centres. This extended to other localities also where because of the rapid decline of Indian agriculture and of India's commerce and trade the industry suffered as well. The craftsmen and their families had enjoyed a citizenship status in the villages as well as the small towns. Most of them had rights to house-sites, back-gardens, and some *manyam* land and generally received a substantial proportion of the agricultural produce at the time of harvest. Similarly, many of them received incomes in various shapes from those engaged in commerce, banking and trade. As the localities began to deteriorate and crumble, because of British rack-renting, decline in the overall economy etc., most of the craftsmen became impoverished. Many were no longer needed for the functions they performed and through legalistic arguments even deprived of their *manyam-s* and house-sites. This continued during most of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and a large number of the craftsmen and others constituting the local infrastructure had to quit the localities.

The state of penury and destitution penetrated practically into every locality and habitat of India. The aim seems to have been to convert India into a land, which mainly produced raw material through agriculture and cattle breeding. Industry if any like blacksmith-y, carpentry, or pottery, was seen merely as an adjunct to the needs of agricultural production.

Because of various pressures and especially because of the British desire to invest newly acquired British capital, a new structure of industrialisation began to be established in various parts of India, especially around Calcutta and Bombay, by about 1880. But the new industry required cheap

and fairly large industrial manpower; in fact that was what promoted its establishment in India. However it can be said with all certainty that those employed in this new industrial structure, on the shop floor, practically all came from the earlier industrial occupations. The miners and manufacturers of metal went into iron and steel, and other metallurgical industries and the experts in stone, the sculptors, painters, masons, tank diggers, etc., were taken into construction and became the labour force of the departments of public works and of the increasing tribe of contractors. Practically all these were treated as labourers and at the most as the mates who directly supervised them.

Thus, the basic workforce of the Indian industry largely came from such occupations and *jati-s*, which had practiced similar pursuits historically and traditionally, and largely, continues to come from these occupations, even today, in the so-called more modern sector of the Indian industry. Further, it seems fairly evident that if this workforce, which derives its skills from age-old practices and skills, was somehow to disappear, the modern Indian managers, engineers, technocrats would find themselves wholly useless in the running of modern industry. Their relation to modern Indian industry is in no way significantly different from the relation of the personnel of the Indian administrative and allied services to the offices and departments over which they preside. In both cases it is their positions and offices which give them the authority to manage men. As experience tells us, they are hardly qualified or gifted in the way of technical inventiveness or innovation, or creativity in forging workable institutions and structures.

The larger proportion of the historical and traditional professionals of Indian industry however, even today, work outside the modern industrial complex, and mostly work individually and on their own. In the idiom of today they would form a fairly large proportion of the 'Backward' and 'Other Backward' castes. The occupations and jati-s from which they come would understandably wish to have their proportionate share in the political and administrative set-up of India, a set-up in which they have not even had a subordinate voice, a privilege which however halting, the brahmin-s, the kayastha-s and a few others had begun to have from about the mid-19th century onwards. However, while these professions and jati-s must have their due share in the working of Indian polity, most of them coming from these professions and jati-s would additionally be of great value to India if they were to become the backbone of a regenerated and flourishing Indian Industry – based on the precious skills, practices and initiative as well as

scholarly understanding of the actual working of industrial processes which they have. Those who manage and supervise the modern sector of Indian industry have, by and large, no such skills and understanding coming as they do overwhelmingly from the non-industrial sections, sections wh moreover constitute no more than 2 per cent of the Indian people. If one were to converse with people belonging to this very large indigenous Indian industrial sector, one would find that both individually, as well as in groups, many of them still retain great ingenuity, sense of discrimination, an aesthetic imagination and judgement, and confidence in their own abilities. Workers in stone, even on the outskirts of Madras, feel confident that if given the chance they can build a temple like the Brahadeeswara Temple at Thanjavur, or the great temple at Suchindram. A goldsmith with few assets feels competent in handling a computer needing repairs, and is confident that given the appropriate resources, he could perhaps even make one himself. And so on.

Our biggest inheritance from British rule is a wholly – politically, institutionally, culturally and spiritually – disoriented India. The impoverishment and deprivation during that period had not only weakened the physique of our people and sapped their individual and social strength but further laid waste their knowledge systems and their occupational and professional talents. The India which the British transferred to Indian hands, to an insignificant minority of the Westernised and exhausted administrative and political elite, despite the inspiration of Mahatma Gandhi and the euphoria produced by the freedom struggle was, in practically every sense, a wasteland in which native intelligence and talent had no place. Though the grip of the British system has been somewhat loosened by time, there is little significant change so far in the way of the utilisation of indigenous Indian talent in the running of India.

This situation can hardly be tolerated any more. The paucity of basic resources, the increasing scarcity in every field, even of water and fertile land, the growing number of the unemployed and underemployed, the civic chaos, disorder and insanitary conditions in our habitats, if not the aspirations of our people, call for an early change of direction. It is asking us to fall back on the ingenuity, innovative capacity, organisational skills, and a variety of talents which our people possess, for the survival of Indian society and to enable it to begin moving towards prosperity and social and individual well-being. In this change of direction those coming from the industrial professions and jati-s, will have to play a major role.

Situated as we are today, we have to put up with the type of modern industry we have so far established in India. But in the context of the potential requirements of the Indian people this modern industry is no more than of secondary value. The same applies to the scientific and technical institutions which have been established, based on some outmoded Western models – of the last century, and more so of the past 50 years – to provide the administrative, technical and research support to this modern industry. Bringing back the thus far ignored indigenous Indian professional industrial skills into public life, should be able to provide a new life and direction to Indian industry and expand the base as well as the production of Indian industry at least tenfold.

For the full utilisation of indigenous industrial talent and capacity, India needs to have a new industrial framework, a major change in approaches and manufacturing techniques, and the necessary R&D support for the new industrial policy. This need not however imply the immediate abandonment of the industry modelled on western knowledge and technology, far less some principled rejection of the western model. The rejection of the western imposition or limitation will come someday but that day is far, and it would then, to begin with, initially come in the context of relation to our definition of man, society and the State and the institutions which serve them. The existing western originated industry merely needs to be diverted to the production and distribution of basic materials, energy, and for the needs of India's external defence. The production of all, or at least many, consumer articles has to be entrusted to industry run and supervised by Indian craftsmen and ultimately by machines and tools designed and produced by them. The idea of consumer goods being produced by cottage or small-scale industry has continued to be debated for decades now. It did not take any practical shape partly because of our indolence and feeble will, manifested in all spheres of Indian life, but more so as no thought was given to its being managed through regenerated indigenous industrial technical knowledge and organisational methods. We got caught in the debate between western-type industrialization and mechanically reverting to the techniques and methods of the eighteenth century. The concept of 'appropriate technology' – a highly western concept emanating from the dissident West – has merely added to our confusion. Incidentally, the founder of the 'appropriate technology' idiom, Dr. E. F. Schumacher, himself saw no possibility of indigenous Indian technology having any place in this new western dispensation. To him it appeared a

dead thing, and a part of the dead past.

As in other spheres the west and the Westerner, for the past 150 to 200 years, is unable to believe that other lands and civilisations can manage their life on their own. If they seem to do so, it invariably sees to it that such independent functioning is rooted out. However, and increasingly so in recent years, it allows a choice. It has many systems to sell in every field, whether it is political structures, academic theories or technological systems and tools. If we don't like one, we can have the other. To it, the choice makes little difference. But we must not be permitted to have our own tools and techniques.

Given the West's long trading history, from the days of Greek antiquity and the nature of its land and climate, trading perhaps has been a necessity for it for mere survival. In recent centuries it has been made into a universal truth by academia, and by brute physical and industrial force. It is a tragedy born of our political immaturity that we have fallen prey to this false formulation of the imperative of international trade and of dependence on exports and imports. Even worse, we even plan to spread this idea to areas where we think our writ may run.

Once we decide to alter the direction of our industrial set-up and to multiply it manifold, it may be useful to institute several task forces, (i) to locate our master craftsmen, (ii) to have an approximate idea of the number of persons available in various fields of indigenous industry, (iii) to find out what proportion of them have also become familiar with the working of western technology in its several fields, and (iv) to work out and suggest the necessary steps to initiate the necessary R&D for the new industrial frame and to spell out the various steps, technical, institutional, etc. essential for setting it up on a wide scale.

But it may be found that to start the whole process we need new technical personnel with indigenous industrial background, or a deep understanding of it, who also have learnt to interact with western technology and have at least a working relationship with its operation. Many with such capacity must be already with us. With their help, many, perhaps ten times as many, scientific and technological institutes (with similar status and resources as the present IITs) need to be set up fairly fast. The content of their teaching, research and specialisation need to be worked out, in the manner it would have been for pioneering institutions elsewhere (like the MIT in USA), as well as the criteria, qualifications, tests for those who would be admitted to them.

According to current findings the India-China region was producing around 73 per cent of the industrial manufactures of the world around 1750. Even in 1830 its industrial production is estimated at 60 per cent of world manufactures. Given appropriate effort the craftsmen and technicians of the Indo-China region can regain their 1750 position within a few decades.

19

Undamming the Flow

[Talk by Dharampal in Madras, 28.3.1993, published in *Ayodhya* and *The Future of India*, Centre for Policy Studies, Madras]

Friends, I have been attending these meetings. And I have learnt quite a bit. But, let me begin by sharing something that deeply affected me. I heard some days ago that after the meeting addressed by Abdus Samad Sahib, there was a discussion between two persons among the audience. One was a Muslim and the other a Hindu. And the Hindu, I think, asked the Muslim that this demolition in Ayodhya must have hurt him. The other said: "Yes, but nothing happens that is not willed by Allah. And, anyway it has provided us a chance to talk to each other, we never have such chances!"

What sort of society is this? One of the greatest Indian journalists of recent times, Girilal Jain, wrote in one of his articles that he knew very few modem Muslims. Girilal Jain, in his 50 years of journalism, must have met tens of thousands of people. And he said that he knew hardly any modern Muslims! Not that he would have known many traditional Muslims either. That was in any case difficult. But he could not come in close contact with even modern Muslims.

Girilal Jain was frank enough to say that. I think most of us also do not know any Muslims. We just don't know other people. We have a sort of study group here in Madras. It is a group of very bright high science people, sociologists, and so on. They have friends and colleagues in 8 or 10 places in India. But, as far as dealing with different people is concerned, their contact does not go very far. They are limited to mostly the Brahminical type. They have no contact with the peasants, with the craftsmen, or with any other people. There is very little contact with the Muslims. Maybe, one or two of them know a Muslim friend or a colleague here and there, no more. And, this is true of all of us.

If you allow me to go in this vein, I shall like to tell you an incident I recall. There is a place called Atiranji-Khera in Uttar Pradesh. This is one of our ancient sites, where artifacts of about 1500 B.C. have been found. I had occasion to visit this place a few times some years ago. It is a big mound, about a mile long and half a mile wide. I went there with other people, the collector and some other district officers, and later I went alone. There is a person there who keeps a lonely watch on the mound, and he began to tell me some stories. He told *Pauranic* stories about some *Raja*, one of the earliest *Raja-s* of India, who ruled when there was no taxation in the country. And then at some point he said in Hindi, "Mein to akela hun ji!" (I am all alone!) I said, "What do you mean? How are you alone?" He said, "Mein to Isai hun ji, Isai, aur Isai ka to ek hi ghar hai is gaon mein." (I am a Christian, and there is only one Christian house in this village).

I wondered, what is this? This man is well-versed in *Pauranic* lore. And, yet he feels alone in this village. How is it? Not that the local people would not talk to him. But he does not feel as if he belongs. The people have not adopted him. They have not made him one of themselves. I think this is the general condition we are getting reduced to. In many ways we are shrinking, splitting, fracturing. This is the sort of society we have come to. And it is no wonder that this sort of society has problems like Ayodhya.

I think this splitting and fracturing of the society must have been going on for some time. This is not recent. This is not a post-independence phenomenon. This is not even post-1850, as Professor Guhan tried to say the other day; as if the problem arose only in 1850! And, this may not only be because of the Muslim rule. This may be a problem which is somehow intrinsic to the Hindu society, which comes from Hindu thought, Hindu ways, Hindu institutions, etc. Or, it may be the result of a certain defensive interaction between the Hindu society and other societies. But this is a situation that I cannot understand.

I will tell you another episode. Some years ago, around 1960, I met some people, and I think in a way that meeting gave me a view of India, the larger India, not my India, or our India, or India of the people sitting here. I was travelling from Gwalior to Delhi, and got into a day train around 10 o'clock in the morning. I think it was a six or seven hour journey in a third-class compartment. The compartment was crowded. Then some people made a seat for me. Somebody moved down on the floor and I sat on the seat. And there was this group of people, about 12 of them, some three or four women and seven or eight men. I asked them where were they coming

from. They said that they had been on a pilgrimage, a three-month long pilgrimage. They had been up to Rameswaram and to various other places. We got talking.

They had various bundles of things and some earthen pots with them. I asked, what did they have in those pots. They said they had taken their own food from home. They came from two different villages, somewhere towards the north of Lucknow. And they had taken all the necessities for their food – atta, ghee, sugar – with them, and some of these were still left.

The women were sitting on the floor, not on the seats, and people were passing by. The people, in their attempt to move around in that crowded compartment, sometimes sort of trampled over them. The women didn't seem to mind that, but they did mind if someone's feet touched their bundles and pots of food.

So we began talking. And then I said they must be all from one jati, from a single caste group. They said, "No, no! We are not from one jati, we are from several jati-s." I said, but how could that be? They said that there was no jati on a yatra not on a pilgrimage. I didn't know that. I was around 38 years old, and I suppose I was like other people like myself who know little about the ways of the Indian people.

So it went on. And then I said, "Did you go to Madras? Did you go to Bombay?" "Yes! We passed through those places." "Did you see anything there?" "No, we didn't have any time!" It went on like that. I mentioned various important places of modern India. They had passed through most, but had not cared to visit any. Then I said, "You're going to Delhi now?" "Yes!" "You will stop in Delhi?" "No, we only have to change trains there. We're going to Haridwar!" I said, "This is the capital of free India. Won't you see it?" I meant it, I was not joking. They said, "No! We don't have time. Maybe, some other day. Not now. We have to go to Haridwar. And then we have to reach back home."

We talked for perhaps five or six hours. And at the end of it I was wondering, who is going to look after this India? What India are we talking about? This India, the glorious India of the modern temples, universities, places of scholarships. For whom are we building them? Those people on their pilgrimage were not interested in any of this. And they were representatives of India. They were more representative of India than Jawaharlal Nehru ever was. Or, I and most of us ever could be.

About the same time Queen Elizabeth II of England was visiting India.

She probably came within one month of my meeting with the pilgrims in the train. There was a write-up about her visit in The Economist of London. The Economist, describing the visit of the Queen to India, said that she was bringing her own food from England, she was bringing her. own chefs, she was not going to visit any temples or any traditional places of India, she was only going to certain other places, modern places, Europeanised places, etc.

And I thought, how similar! How similar were the ways of the Queen of England and those of the people of India I had met on their way to Haridwar? Those pilgrims were real royalty. It is not a matter of the Muslims and the Hindus. The Muslims of India would be similar, the Christians of India would also be similar.

The world of the people of India, it seems, is a different world. The world we are talking about is not theirs. Even the Hindutva we are talking about is not theirs. I think, their Hindutva and our Hindutva are entirely different. Or, for that matter the Islam we talk about, or the Islam Sri Shahabuddin talks about, or the great Imam Sahib of Jama Masjid talks about, is also not the Islam of the Indian people. We, the elite of India, and the people are living in different worlds.

What is the Shahi Imam anyway? And why do we keep calling him Shahi Imam? Why not just the Imam of Jama Masjid? I think that we, over the past few centuries, have got too much attached to royalty, royal ways, royal manners, not the royal ways of the people, but to those of the alien despots. So we keep talking about the Islamic royalty, the Sultanate, or the Lodhi-s, or the Mughal-s, and so on. What kind of royal rulers were they anyway? They were tottering, most of them, and most of the time. And they were not the rulers of the whole of India. I think the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha and the Bharatiya Janata Party must partly be held responsible for exaggerating the extent of Muslim rule. The historians of course are responsible for originating such conceptions. But the historians do not matter, these people do.

What was Muslim rule in India? What were its dimensions? At no particular time did Muslim rule extend to more than half of India. And, what is the period? I would say from about 1200 to around 1700, around 1690, in fact, because the power of Aurangzeb had been broken by then. The British keep the myth of ruling in the name of the Mughal rulers of Delhi till 1857. But the British did it in the name of the Nawab of Arcot too! The Nawab of Arcot is a camp follower of the British. He is a boy of 16 when

he joins them around 1748 and he lives till 1790. Then his son, or some kin, becomes the successor and till 1799, when Karnataka is taken over by the British formally and legally, he is only the Nawab of Arcot. The day they take over Karnataka, he is turned out, and then termed as the Nawab of Karnataka.

This is the British way of doing things, of establishing legitimacy, and we have fallen for that. We have rejoiced in it. Ram Manohar Lohia used to say that if only Jawaharlal Nehru could have admitted that he was only the son of a thaneder, not of a great aristocrat, it would have been better for him and the country. What is this matter of being descended from great aristocracy? A few thousand Muslim families, perhaps most of them direct descendants of Arabs, Turks, Afghans, Iranians, etc., also unfortunately seem to feel the way Jawaharlal Nehru did. Whether he acquired this attitude from them or they from him, may be worth inquiring.

Why can't we say we are descendants of ordinary men? Or, say that we are all descended from Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, or some other great epic hero. And if we do that, then all of us, not only a select few, must trace our descent to such a great hero. This whole business of splitting the society into a few and the rest is wrong. We do such splitting and naturally the larger component of the society has no interest in what the few do. And then nothing happens in the society anymore.

Look at what has been happening in India for the last 45 years. Nothing has moved. I don't mean that the last 45 years are wasted. Nothing is wasted. But nothing very much has come out of it, except that we have just survived those 45 years. That is all that we have done.

When I talk of these matters, people say, "But then we cannot give up centralism! Centralism is so precious; the world wants centralism. How can one give up centralism?" But what do we have to do with the world? If centralism does not suit us, if it is not according to our capacities, then how can we keep it going? What will it deliver for us? And, if we are keeping centralism only to be protected from Bangladesh or Pakistan, it is not really worth keeping.

We must have a system that delivers what we want, and we must know what we want. Or let us say that we have become protected territories. Perhaps for 20 years we were, in a way, the protected territories of the Russians, now we may become the protected territories of western Europe or the United States of America. If that is what we want, then let us say so.

At least it would be clear, it would be in the open, and at some stage we would probably come out of it honourably.

In this kind of situation, a society, a nation, begins to splinter. It is no wonder that in this situation the ordinary people of India have their grievances, some ancient, some of them more recent. From time to time, they try to join together to redress one grievance or the other. For example, for the last six months a major movement is going on against liquor in Andhra Pradesh. Women are leading it. Probably tens of thousands of women are involved. Maybe lakhs are involved. It is indeed a great event, that these women of India, or of Andhra Pradesh, have stood up and have given this fight and are still at it. And if they can give a fight against arrack today, they can fight against other issues tomorrow. They can fight for India, for her freedom and her honour.

It is in this sense of the people of India getting together to give a fight to redress some grievance of theirs that I look at Ayodhya. Of course, one could ignore Ayodhya, ignore the Babri Masjid. One need not even see it. One doesn't have to see everything. After all, about 50 Lakh people visit Varanasi every year, maybe more than 50 lakh. I suppose most of them also visit the Vishwanath temple. My feeling is that most of these people who visit the Vishwanath temple are not aware of the mosque there. Unless, of course, somebody tells them. They by themselves are not likely to be aware of the mosque. Because what have they got to do with that mosque?

The other day someone mentioned that there is no mention of Babri Masjid in the Ramacaritamanas of Goswami Tulasidas. Why should there be a mention of Babri Masjid in the Ramacaritamanas? The Ramacaritamanas is not a historical record of that time. Tulasidas is not recounting what is happening from year to year in the sixteenth century. He is concerned about something larger, something precious to him. What he is concerned about possibly, may not seem larger than the events of his time to some of us, but it certainly is precious to him. So he may not be bothered about the Babri Masjid.

Similarly these people who come to pray at the Vishwanath temple are not bothered to notice the mosque. But if their attention is drawn then they are indeed disturbed. And their attention is drawn from time to time by various people. It has not begun to happen only in the last 45 years, and this drawing of attention has been done not only by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha or the Vishwa Hindu Parishad or even the Bharatiya Janata Party. A whole lot of sanyasi-s go around India, telling about what

has happened to our country in the past and what is happening in it at present. People listen, most of it they ignore. But then at some stage something becomes an issue, it becomes an issue of honour.

And we know that there is so much dishonour, which we try to disguise as best we can. But there are limits. And when the limits are crossed we simply remove ourselves from public activity, we detach ourselves from certain parts of public life, and become more private, more and more private, more and more shrunk within ourselves. This process has gone on in our society for a very long time, especially during the last one hundred and fifty years, but perhaps since much earlier. Perhaps we have been shrinking like this for the last three hundred or four hundred years, at least in north India, though not so much in the south. But there must have been repercussions of it in the south also.

When a feeling arises that one is being particularly dishonoured by some structure or the other, some left-over of the past or the other, then there is no way to stop it. Because, what is the test that we have attained freedom since 1947? How do I know as a craftsman, or as a villager, or as a camara, or whatever, that I am free? Where is that freedom? What is the test? Am I listened to more? Does the collector stand up and shake hands with me? Does a member of the Planning Commission meet me on equal terms? He doesn't, neither the collector, nor the member of the Planning Commission. And, I am not talking only of the present members of the Planning Commission. I am talking of the members of the first Planning Commission itself, who were supposed to have been much more patriotic and who were brought up in the traditions of the freedom struggle. Even they would not have stood up for an ordinary Indian, and talked with him like an equal. Even they were contemptuous of the people.

So what does the ordinary man do? How does he know that he is living in a free country? Some test has to be there. Then he would say, they have not beenable to do much about my food, my clothing, my housing and so on. He may say that it is alright, but that he must express his sensibilities, his sensitivities, in some form.

There is a note written around 1770, about the Indian peasant. It is written by one of the then judges of the Calcutta high court, Le Maistre, and he relates how, in his view, the mind of the Indian peasant recounts what has happened to him over a long period.[1] The peasant recounts what

[1]See supplementary note given subsequently.

his rent was in the beginning, how it was increased, and he remembers that it was increased some ten times. And he keeps on reminding himself of many other similar misfortunes. And then he says, perhaps a day will come, when all this will disappear.

So, these are the people who constitute India. They are waiting for the day when all these alien constructs will disappear from their life. Then, their attention is drawn to places like Ayodhya, or to Varanasi, or to what my friend Sita Ram Goel says about the 3,000 mosques which have been built over temples in India. When their attention is drawn to such and similar things a time comes when they say, "But at least we should do something about this." There is of course lethargy. There is the Indian indolence. But still people get mobilised. And they say let us do something about this.

So they go to such a place one year. Not much happens. Only ceremonial rituals take place, ceremonies of all sorts are performed. They go there the next year, they go the third year. And then people begin saying that these people, who had drawn their attention to it, don't mean business, they are just tricking us. They used to say that even in 1977-78. Of course, people were very happy then that the Janata government had come in Delhi. But within a year a large number of people had begun saying, we wish Indira Gandhi were back. And she was back within another year and a half.

It is possible that on the 6th of December, 1992 some big conspiracy was hatched by the Prime Minister of India, or by the Indian police forces, or by the Indian army, or by the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and the Rashtriya Swayansevak Sangha, or by the Bajarang Dal, or the Shiv Sena – by all of them together, or perhaps separately – to demolish this mosque. It is possible. But, it is also possible that none of these parties themselves were capable of doing this, or had even thought of this. Because, these people, those of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, etc., probably wanted to prolong the whole affair. They perhaps merely wanted to have a big *tamasa*, a grand show, year after year, because we live on such *tamasa-s*. We have had threats from Pakistan for 45 years, we live on that. We move from crisis to crisis, so that we don't have to do anything in India for the people of India.

So, this could have dragged on. I'm sure the Bharatiya Janata Party would have happily allowed it to drag on for some more time. I do not mean that Lai Krishna Advani or anybody else in particular wanted it to

drag on. But as a party, the Bharatiya Janata Party would have preferred that. The Congress has been playing this game of keeping various *tamasa-s* going for decades now, and the Bharatiya Janata Party is no different from the Congress, or the Janata Dal, or the leftist parties. All of them are about the same. Even Devi Lai behaves similarly, though he claims to be a great peasant leader.

But, either because of a conspiracy or because of the initiative of the people, the structure crumbled. They demolished the structure. And, when they demolished it, and when I read about it next morning or perhaps heard about it from somebody, I really did feel relieved. My feeling is that most of the people sitting here also would have felt the same. There of course are people here who are secular, who are not affected by the Bharatiya Janata Party or the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha, etc. But even they, I believe, would have felt relieved in a way. You know the kind of feeling one has at the end of a prolonged illness of an old man. There is sorrow, but it is also accompanied by great happiness or great anger. These emotions can all go together.

Later, of course, people had to strike different poses, they had to adopt public postures. And there was rioting, there was police action, and there were police atrocities, perhaps. But our police are highly over-stretched, and we have to deploy the army to back the police system. We don't have that many police. I think for everyone thousand citizens we have much fewer policemen than there are in Britain, or in the United States of America. Therefore, perhaps half our army was posted at three or four hundred different places within the country. There was rioting, there was police action, and there were police atrocities, and people got killed, and a few thousands died.

But supposing the structure were not demolished. What would have happened? The frustration that it would have generated around the country would have been unbearable. I don't think anybody could have controlled the consequences of such frustration. Even if the great Indira Gandhi or the great Jawaharlal Nehru were to come back, they couldn't have done it. Jawaharlal Nehru couldn't do anything even in 1949, when the murti-s, the idols, were installed at Ayodhya. Because, after all he knew the mood of the people.

And a political leader has to act according to the mood of the people. He can only do what is possible, what is acceptable. He can do no more. Maybe, a Stalin could do more. But even that is not certain. Because what-

ever Stalin did crumbled at some stage. And, Stalin must have achieved certain things for the Soviet Union or for Russia. We cannot probably achieve that much, because we are not Stalin-s. We are not structured that way. We are not like Europeans. We are Indians. We are indolent. We move slowly. We want rest after every littlestep we take. We couldn't have done what Stalin did. We couldn't have crashed the people.

And so, I would say that it was the best possible thing for India that this demolition came on that day, whatever the later consequences. Of course, the killings that took place subsequent to the demolition are very unfortunate. But killings have been going on almost routinely in India. Such killings have been taking place not only between the Hindus and the Muslims, or between the Muslims and the police. All sorts of killings have been going on. I do not say that the amount of killing that has been routinely happening in India is more than what it used to be before 1947. Perhaps not. Because the amount of killing which went on in India in the nineteenth century is colossal. And, of course, we do not have so many starvation deaths now as we had in the late eighteenth and the whole of the nineteenth century, though we are still largely underfed, under-nourished and under-clothed.

The Ayodhya events have, to some extent, made us reflect on our problems. The amount that has been written and talked about Ayodhya, is enormous. There are probably hundreds and thousands of forums, where this issue is being discussed. Various positions are being taken, long cherished positions are being altered, and so on. In the midst of such intense retrospection and discussion there is a possibility that from this issue, we shall move to other issues.

Of course, it is possible that we won't move to any other issues concerning Indian polity. We shall stick to Ayodhya and, maybe, build the temple, and then put a seal of approval on Sri Advani's statement when he offered to close all disputes if only the Muslims would agree on Ayodhya. Incidentally, I happened to be there when Sri Advani made his famous statement. I heard him. And, he said that if the Muslims were to accept the moving of the Babri Masjid – there was no question of demolition at that time – then he would try to persuade his people and his party that they should not demand any other moving or demolition, at Varanasi or Mathura or anywhere else.

I was even then surprised at Sri Advani's statement. Maybe, as a political leader he has to say such things. Though at that time there didn't seem to be any particular occasion or urgency for his statement. It was not a very important event that he was participating in while he made that statement. He was probably releasing two books at that time in the Himachal Bhavan at Delhi. It was no great event. But he made that statement. And many other people made similar statements. Some people said that the restoration of three historical temples would be enough, and others proposed other formulas.

But how can anybody decide on such issues? For that matter how can anybody decide that certain temples won't have to be demolished? Or, certain churches won't have to be demolished? In any case we seem to have too many of the churches, and also in many parts large numbers of ancient and later temples, which have no resources and no people to look after them, and there are also no ideas or plans of using them as centres of culture, education or crafts.

I was recently looking at the 1981 census data for Uttar Pradesh. Uttar Pradesh has only about one and a half lakh Christians. And there are some 58 to 60 districts in Uttar Pradesh. This would amount to some three thousand to five thousand Christians on an average per district. But the number of churches, and the number of Christian educational institutions, etc., in most districts seems to be fairly large. It would seem that many of these churches and other Christian institutions probably have nobody to attend to them.

The same would be true of Hindu temples in many areas. There would be many temples that have no devotees. For what do we keep having these temples? We even keep on saying that the Hindu temples in Pakistan should be preserved. For what? There are no Hindus there, except a few in Sindh. Why do we want the preservation of things which are of no interest to anybody? We would probably have to enact municipal laws and evolve policies so that these issues can be handled in a reasonable manner. After all we have to live as reasonable people and reasonable beings. And we have to interlink amongst ourselves and with the places around us in a reasonable manner.

And why have we begun to create this picture of monoliths? Who are these monolithic Muslims and monolithic Hindus? Have they no other connections? Does a Hindu have no other identity except as a Hindu? But he is so many other things at the same time. He belongs to a locality, he is

part of a kinship system, he is part of a professional system. And a professional system need not mean only theoretical physics, or engineering or some similarly high and esoteric activity. It could be carpentry, it could be shoe-making, or leather-working, or anything else. Similarly, the Muslims are Muslims in only one sense. They are half a dozen other things also. Why are we clubbing people like that? Why are we making them shrink into only one identity?

I think our whole outlook would have to change. And if Ayodhya symbolises such a movement in one way or the other, then it is a welcome development. It doesn't matter what the leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad want, or their opponents want, or the editors of various newspapers want. Because all these leaders of political and other opinion do not matter. They would all fade away in another ten years. These are largely residues of the British period. These are all people born in the early decades of the twentieth century. They would be no more by the end of this century. So, they don't matter. But others, the younger people, those born after Independence, they matter.

And this world of which we are so scared! Why are we so scared of the world? The world has always been like the way it is today. The world is violent. The world has self-interest. Nobody is there for charity. We have had experience of the great civilising mission of Europe. Europe had a great mission. It conquered the world. It tried to change the face of man. This would go on. It would happen again and again. They can do it again, perhaps in the name of environment, or in the name of human rights, or something else.

Islam also has been fighting. Islam started conquest soon after the death of Hazrat Mohammed in the seventh century A.D. and, within fifty years Islam had reached Spain in the west and Sindh in the east. And this vast conquest was not achieved through modernism. It was not done through modem technology produced in the great institutes of technology, or through the great discoveries of modern science. That conquest was achieved through sheer spirit, determination and will. They did it. Now this can happen again. And the people who did it had very little in terms of material advantage. Europe, when it started on its world conquest, did not possess much more than the people whom it conquered. Similarly, was the case with Islam.

There are people in the world today who possess great machinery and means. They have a higher standard of living, and more economic goods,

and so on. But I don't think this is to the point. The point is, what is our spirit? What do we want? Do we have ingenuity? Can we make our point? Do we have a point to make as Indians? If we do not have a point to make as Indians, we should retire. We should give up. Because the world is not for those who have nothing to achieve of their own, who have nothing special to aspire to, who only wish to be allowed to follow the leaders.

I am amazed at ourselves, and the way we react to any assertion of Indian identity and Indian sensitivity. One can say that the ordinary people are ignorant, that they are moved by passions and emotions. But even Mahatma Gandhi – perhaps we should stop taking his name for the next ten or twenty years – even he reacted to events that impinged on our identity and sensitivity as Indians. There was a temple desecrated in Gulbarga in 1924 or 1925, and he reacted to the desecration within a few months. And then two years later he goes to Gulbarga and makes a speech about the events. It is about one-and-a-half-page speech as reported in the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. I shall read you a passage from it :[2]

> "Much as I would like to pour out my agony before you, I know that it will be a cry in the wilderness. I therefore daily send out my prayer to God: 'Lord, do somehow deliver us from this conflagration.' But I should be untrue to my creed if as a believing and satyagrahi Hindu I disguise from you the feelings within me. When I went into the temple, I was shown the spot where the idol was removed and the Nandi was desecrated. I tell you the sight pained me. You may call me an idolater if you will. I see God everywhere and in everything. I tell you God will never approve of these acts of desecration. Whilst in Yervada Jail, I read Maulana Shibli's Life of the Prophet, I also read Usva-e-Sahaba and can say that those who did the acts were wrong, that Islam never sanctioned such things and they were guilty before God and man..."

Now if a man like him, who is so restrained, who uses so few words, who does not ever expend emotion without reason, if this man can say this, then how much more, thousand times more, would other people feel.

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[2]The desecration of the Sharana Basappa Temple at Gulbarga took place in August 1924. Mahatma Gandhi reacted almost immediately and with great sadness. For his detailed reaction, see, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol.25, pp.45-48. More than two years later, during his visit to Gulbarga, he again took up the issue in a speech he made on February 22, 1927 in the courtyard of the temple. The quotation is from that speech. See, *Collected Works*, Vol. 33, pp.114.

One would say that he was reacting to something which had happened two years previously, and these people are reacting to something which happened 500 years ago. But if people feel concerned about things which are not only two years old, but several hundred years old, what is wrong about it? Human beings are like that. They feel concerned about old things, and new things. And, we have to treat human beings as human beings, they are not gods, they are not *sanyasi-s*, they are ordinary gruhastha-s, ordinary householders, who are irrational, rational, angry, quiet, indolent, and so on. They react in various ways, and when the emotion is spent, they also settle down.

In any case, of what use would be this argument about history having gone stale, when the Rashtrapati Bhavan is demolished; or the buildings of the planning commission, or of the south block or the north block are brought down. And these will be brought down. I don't think this will take very long, another 50 years perhaps. Tughalakabad has gone, other places have gone. The British colonial structures will go the same way.

These things happen in societies oft and again. And these have to happen here. Unless they happen, all this debris which we have accumulated in ourselves, in our spirit, in our body politic, in our institutions, etc., would not disappear. And, I think the task really is that the debris which has accumulated has to be washed away. And, it is not only the Muslim and the Christian debris, it is also a lot of Hindu debris that needs to be removed. We have been probably accumulating this debris from the very ancient period, perhaps since the last great cleansing that the gods undertook for us in the form of the Mahabharata war.

Unless this house cleaning is done, I do not think that we would reach anywhere. We can of course keep on as we are going on now, as a stagnant society in which about a million families can have a living which in a minor way is similar to living in Britain, Europe or the United States of America. And a fraction of these one million have some sense of power, they have some authority.

There are perhaps some fifty thousand officers in India, or a hundred thousand at the most, who can order other people around. It is, of course, possible to continue like this.

But if we think this is enough, then we should say so. And we should say that the others, the 800 million or more of Indians, don't matter. Let them die. Or, we should say that we will be responsible for them, as

Europeans were responsible for their populations. Because Europeans did take responsibility for their people, both for looking after them and for eliminating them. Europe did both, and it does both even today, all over the world, and within itself. Europe did not start cruelty abroad, it started cruelty at home, at least from the time of Plato, and probably from much earlier. This fancy liberal picture of Europe that many of us have is just not true. There is no such picture. Jawaharlal Nehru may have believed in this picture, Mahatma Gandhi did not. Mahatma Gandhi may have erred in many other things, he did not err on this point.

Let us be clear. Do we want a European type of society, and do we have the capacity to enforce it and keep it going? I don't think we have the capacity. We are too comfort-loving, we are too indolent. We cannot do this. And so we will have to come to terms with ourselves. We shall have to come to terms with what our people can do and carry forward. They cannot carry impossible loads. And we have been making them carry impossible loads.

My feeling is that these women in Andhra who are agitating against arrack, and also the people who assembled in Ayodhya on the 6th of December 1992, and many other people who are now stirring themselves to take care of many other things, are harbingers of something. If what they are doing, and what they have done, reflects their innermost feelings – rational or irrational, reasonable or unreasonable – then there is a chance that we would be on the road to recovery and to a different polity. Otherwise, we would keep stumbling along.

Discussion followed by the talk

Radha Rajan: Sir, your talk has been very disturbing. In the first place, I don't think you are much in favour of centralism. And, you must have obviously thought of an alternative to centralism. I would like to know what is this alternative?

From your talk I also gather that you find many of the institutions and public places that we have accumulated to be offensive to good sense. And therefore, you find the demolition of the structure at Ayodhya to be justified. The structure, according to you, had to come down because it was one of the more offensive examples of the way we have messed up our public spaces. But the perception of what is evil, what is unesthetic and what is offensive, differs from person to person, from group to group. If groups of people were to begin removing objects that seem offensive to them for some reason, then there is going to be no end to the demolition of institu-

tions and structures that are causing us concern – whether it is the planning commission, or the Rashtrapati Bhavan, or the mosques at Mathura and Kashi. How do we settle what is really offensive to good sense, and what merely seems offensive because of the deviant perception of a particular group? How many institutions and structures do we destroy? And where do we stop?

Dharampal: I do not really understand what is the centralism that we keep talking about. What we inherited from the British as the centralised administration, and that we are so attached to, was a tottering structure. It was tottering already in 1900, by the British standards. It was unusable. They tried to patch it up by bringing in some reforms here and there. But the patchwork didn't work.

We inherited that tottering structure, we took it over we tried to plaster over the cracks, we got some stray experts from here and there to help us with strutting up the structure. Such stray experts had begun to arrive in India from different lands of the world already in 1948 and perhaps from even earlier, and we made much of them. They helped us with this plan and that plan. There were also some old plans about irrigation, power generation, engineering, and technical education, etc., lying around since the 1920s. We dusted up those plans, and began to build structures like the Bhakra Dam and institutions like the IITs of which we seem to be so proud.

But this tottering British frame, pasted over by stray institutions and structures built according to long forgotten plans conceived by the British for different times, and according to the advice received from sundry experts invited from different parts of the world, does not constitute any kind of centralised polity. What we have in the name of centralised institutions are merely the tottering residues of the British empire. Some parts of these residues the British had inherited from the earlier Delhi rulers, or what the British pretended were the earlier Delhi rulers and their institutions. These residues do not work. And these kind of institutions and structures hardly constitute centralism of any sort.

We should have created our own centralism, if we wanted to. We did not. We did nothing, either about institutions, or about laws, or about rules of office procedures. We have about 300 manuals left behind by the British, which govern the working of the departments of government, and of different offices, police stations, treasuries and so on. Most of the regulations were created between 1770 to 1830, in the Boards of Revenue,

Military Boards, and other imperial structures, and later put together in these manuals with some modifications here and there. But even our constitution was constructed similarly from old imperial regulations and acts, selections from which were brought together in a voluminous text with some minor modifications and additions picked up from different constitutions of the world.

Your other worry is about what would happen if groups begin to do things their way. But the people of India, joined together in groups formed around their communities, their localities, their castes, their professions and so on, will do things in their own ways. Who are we to tell them not to do this or that?

I remember having been in a party in Moradabad some five or six year ago, where a number of police officers of the level of DIGs and SSPs were present. It was around the time of Holi, and the police officers were talking about the people of a dominantly Muslim locality nearby. They were saying that the Muslims of that place and other towns around Moradabad were objecting to the invasion of television into their lives, they were worried that it was having a bad influence on their people and was spoiling their children. And the very responsible police officers in that party were wondering how the Muslims could dare to say such things? They were agreed that the television programs were indeed bad, but they could not understand what right the Muslims had to object to them. The Muslims, they were certain, could not be allowed to stop their children from watching television. In fact, they felt that they as high police officers of the area, could issue orders proscribing such objections to the television on the part of the Muslims.

What is this? We should sort out our minds and our information. Who is to run this country, the officers of this decrepit system inherited from the imperial masters, or the people of India? We cannot keep this game of imperial governance going. This game has been played out. It has become purposeless. It doesn't even give any enjoyment to the players, not even to the officers of the Indian administrative and police services who run the country.

We should remember that the people have their ways of bending the strongest of the systems. They removed the statues of Lenin from all over Russia, and it happened much before Yeltsin came into the picture. At that time the Moscow News came up with the advice that only one statue of Lenin, erected at his birth place, would be enough. If this could happen in

Russia, it can happen anywhere.

Somebody here mentioned that our people should have been educated to make them appreciate the virtues of democracy. But, we know what the educated of India are doing. The money-making is being done by the educated. Large moneys, in crores or hundreds of crores – everything is in hundreds of crores in India somehow – are being made by the educated people, by the ones who have been to Oxford and Cambridge, and the current counterparts of such institutions in the United States of America and elsewhere.

Radha Rajan: Sir, do we then transfer our hatred or objections from the institutions to the people?

Dharampal: No, I am not saying that. What I am saying is that the Indian situation today is one of chaos and disorder. It is a situation in which nothing functions. Because this is what the British system was structured for. The system was created so that all tensions, all resistance, all initiative of the people could be absorbed and aborted, so that control would become easier. They tried various other means of controlling the Indian people. They tried Christianisation, they tried Westernisation, they tried these queer ideas of Indo-European brotherhood. Nothing worked. None of this could subdue the Indian people. Ultimately the only thing that they could do was to make a system that would absorb everything and squelch all initiative. In that sense it is a well devised system. It can deliver order. But it cannot deliver dignity and prosperity. If we want only order, then let us say so. Let us not then talk of progress, advance, economic betterment and similar other things. Those cannot be delivered by what the British created. Order can be. If we cherish such order of the grave, we should continue to have this system. And we should protect it to the best of our abilities.

Soundararajan: Sir, there is no place of worship in India today that is free from the taint of money, or some vested interest or the other. The next stage of this mixing up of gross material interests with religion is the politics of religion, that we are witnessing today. What happened in Ayodhya on December 6 was the culmination of a series of steps that flowed from the rampant political abuse of religion. Should we not keep religion as a completely private affair, so that such conflicts around religion are avoided?

Dharampal: Who are we to decide this? If human beings are otherwise, if they want to mix up politics and religion, and various other things,

as they have been doing for thousands of years, do you think we shall change it? We have had great prophets and great saints, not only in India but in other lands also. They could not change human nature. So, let us only talk of what is possible and reasonable, not the impossible.

This earth is not meant for the gods. It is for ordinary human beings, with their human passions and human emotions. These passions and emotions are of all kinds, good and bad are all mixed up there. Human nature is a mixed business. And in this mixed-up business, the arrangements have to be such that most things keep going on in a satisfactory manner. This functionality is all that is required, this is what social life is all about, and this is all that the state can deliver.

The State cannot revolutionise human nature. This whole business of imagining that artificial structures created by man would revolutionise human life is meaningless. About 50 years ago we used to hear that man will be completely changed by the Soviet experiment. It was said that there would be a different man by the end of the twentieth century. There were great books written about it in the 1930s and 1940s. What happened? Where has that new man gone? And what happened of that great Soviet experiment?

Or take Europe. It has been a Christian area, at least formally, for 1700 years. I am told that the reality was somewhat different. Some areas of Germany could be fully Christianised only by the end of the fifteenth century. Even then it is around 500 years of Christian living that Europe has experienced. How much violence has been perpetrated by the Christian Europe in these 500 years? Their saviour is a messenger of peace, isn't He? But in spite of the saviour there was no peace. It was probably not possible.

Why don't we reflect on what has happened in history and recognise the limitations that man has been subject to even in the best of societies? We have to have a pragmatic attitude. Our sights must be lowered. Because by keeping our sights so high, we'll fail much more.

Vairavan: Sir, I have a doubt that the appeal of the Hindutva ideology is confined only to the so-called upper sections of Hindu society. It seems that the Harijans and other so-called lower castes will never be attracted by Hindutva. The obstacles in the path of resurgence of Hinduism thus come not from the Muslims or other minorities, but from within the Hindu fold, from the groups and castes that have been defined to be low within the Hindu hierarchy. Gaining their support, I believe, is more important than

building the temple for Sri Rama.

Dharampal: I don't know if the Harijans have the kind of feelings we are attributing to them. If Hindutva is defined in some peculiar manner, it may be that they would not appreciate that. But if Hindutva means being Hindu, then I don't think the Harijans will keep out. I do not believe that the Harijans are any less Hindu. They are perhaps more Hindu than most of us. Their faith is greater, otherwise they would have left Hinduism ages ago. They haven't left it. They are there. They are attached to it much more than I would be, or many of us sitting here would be. We have escape-routes, we can run away from Hinduism, we can become moderners, we can become westerners; and we have become westerners. They, the Harijans and others, have not. They have stuck to Hinduism. They don't even have rights of entry to the great temples despite the constitutional provisions, but they have their little temples and they have preserved the faith. I don't think they are a problem. The way we defined Hindutva may of course be a problem.

Let me tell you an experience I recently had in a village near here. It is in the Chengalpattu district, about 50 kilometres from Madras. I have gone there a few times. It is an old village. There are still some brahmin families there. And the habitation is divided into the main village, the Oor, and what you call the Chery, the Harijan hamlet. It is a large hamlet. And there is a man there, who is a school teacher. I don't know any Tamil; he knows some English. And, through a little English and a little translation, I was able to converse with him a bit. We went through many subjects. I asked whether they happened to go to the village temple. Incidentally, there is a beautiful temple in the Oor. It is ancient, perhaps about 800 years old. So, I asked, "Do your people go to the village temple?" He said, "We can go, nobody would stop us. But the people of the Oor would not like it. So we don't go."

Then the talk went a bit further. And he just mentioned that his daughter got married to somebody who set up house in the Oor, in the lane where the Kamam, the village accountant, lived. It is one of the major lanes of the village, and every year the rath yatri of the temple deity used to pass through this lane. But the year the daughter of this school-teacher in the Chery and her husband began living in that lane, the rath yatri stopped entering the lane!

He was telling me this story without much emotion. And when he told me about the rath yatri avoiding the lane where his daughter lived, I looked

at him and wondered what would happen to that beautiful, ancient temple. The *Brahmins* cannot look after it. There are only 15 or 16 of the *Brahmin* families left there. There were many more about 200 years ago, but they have left. And those who are still there in the village are mostly older people. They too would disappear in another 10 or 20 years. What will happen to the temple then? If the Harijans are to be kept away from the temple, who would look after it? Who would protect it?

The Harijans, who could have looked after that great temple, have created their own little temple near where they live, and they have their own fairly grand temple festival every year.

So now, how does one define Hindutva? And who is for it and who is against? It is very difficult to say. There are different images of Hindutva that different people have. And because we have had a bad time for 200 years, or for much longer in some areas, we are in a bad shape. We are probably acclimatising ourselves to breathe in the fresh air of freedom after those centuries of slavery. And may be one day we'll be able to reflect on these issues and find solutions. But it could also be that we are usually somewhat slow in these matters, and by the time we are ready to solve a problem we find that the problem is gone, and we have got into some other difficulty. This has been happening to us in history. This perhaps is the Indian tragedy. I don't know.

Sekhar Raghavan: Sir, I would like to know what would have been Mahatma Gandhi's reaction if he survived to see this demolition?

Dharampal: He wouldn't have been too happy, I think. But, he would have had a different attitude towards the event. Or, if he had felt as disturbed as most of the vocal sections of India claim that they have been, if he had felt that such an event would be a national shame as many of our commentators have described it, then he would have staked his life to avert the event. That is the kind of man he was. I don't think he would have said that we must sit down and sort it out, but he would have done that much earlier, in 1949 or 1950 itself. He would not have allowed it to fester, the way we have done.

Radha Rajan: When they did not heed the Mahatma on the question of partition, do you think they would have heeded him on this?

Dharampal: You are right that he was bypassed at that stage. My feeling is that he was on the losing side from around 1944, and he sensed it, and other people sensed it too. And because other people sensed it, they

took advantage of the situation. In any case the world is encouraging these other people, the world wants them. For example in India: The Transfer of Power documents, which the British have published, President Roosevelt of the USA is of the firm view that whatever steps the British took in India – this was in August 1942 – the final result must be that India stays within the "western orbit". Obviously, Mahatma Gandhi was not the man who would keep India within the western orbit. So they wanted other people to take over. And thus the events happened the way they happened.

But if this man had lived longer and if he still had the spirit in him, he would have thought of ways of once again mobilising the Indian people, who were his source of power and authority. And then perhaps nobody in India could have challenged him. Then, certainly things in India would have moved differently. I won't say they would have moved in an ideal, Utopian way. But many things, which have remained unsorted and ignored under the illusion that we are now entering the modern world and these things do not matter, would have been attended to.

After independence we did not attend to matters that needed attention. We were swept off our feet by the idea of modernity and progress, we were carried away by the magic of these words. And, for about five to ten years we lived on the basis of that magic. Then these foreign experts, like Rostov, came and pronounced that we were about to reach the "take-off point". And my feeling is that the day Rostov pronounced the take-off of modernity in India, the whole thing began to collapse the next day.

So, modernism did not work, the older problems remained unattended, and our political situation became more and more complicated. The complications arose not because of the outside world alone, we also had more problems within ourselves, within our society. The splintering and the fracturing of the society became more and more acute.

And then we began to look at politics in a manner that, though seen as normal in the world outside India, was new to us. We began to look upon politics as the game of power, as the means to ill-gotten riches, as the means for acquiring control over men, and so on. The older purpose of Indian politics, the purpose that had made politics in India one of the noblest forms of service to the nation, the purpose that had prevailed in Indian politics from 1920 to 1950, disappeared. A new type of politician emerged on the scene, new values began to rule the world of politics. And from around 1970 the new culture became supreme. From then onwards, everybody in public life came to be seen as corrupt. Probably, the extent of corruption

was not that large, but the way it was talked about, everything, even if it was not corrupt, became corrupt. The mind got obsessed with this.

We, the ruling elite, were thus further cut off from our people. And since we were cut off from the world of the ordinary Indian, we began living in a different world. We began cultivating people like ourselves in the rest of the world. We have about half a million Indian doctors, engineers, etc., outside the country. Thus, we began to belong to a world fraternity. We became some sort of universal men, and universal women, who had no stakes in this country. And this fraternity of the alienated now includes almost every Indian who has some little access to resources and thus some possibility of exhibiting some initiative.

I think the problem of India is very complicated. It is not easy to handle. And it is perhaps not fair to blame any individual or any group of people for this condition. There is so much accumulation of the past, which we are unable to understand, interpret and link together. And, we also do not have the courage to throw it away. So we feel stuck in the mire. And, therefore, those of us who find the opportunity, run away from this sticky business, and try to find refuge in the world and its ways that seem relatively simpler and easier to grasp.

We the elite seem to have given up on the problem of India. We have no clue how to solve it, and how to make India come into herself again. We are merely surviving, and that too at a rather low level of existence, at the mercy of the rest of the world. It is no wonder that in this situation the people of India take things into their own hands once in a while and try to show us the way.

Supplementary Note

Note on the Indian Peasant: Mr. Justice Le Maistre (around 1775)

In a country, that has been subject to so many revolutions to expect the proof of customs and usages with all the technical exactness by the law of England, would be perhaps to expect an impossibility.

This is a country of considerable manufactures as well as agriculture; and the good policy of the despot must, I think, have intervened to control his power. Nor can I think that this country without such regulations, could have been in the flourishing state it was, when it came into the hands of the Company.

The timid natives of this country, though inured to slavery for so many generations, still have a sense of the injustice of this legislative authority in the despot. It is notorious that the *ryot*, who does not pay perhaps above twenty rupees a year for his taxes for the ground upon which he and his ancestors have subsisted for ages, keeps his account in columns in this manner: so much, says he, in the first was the original payment which was made by my ancestors. So much, says he, in another, it was increased by Aliverdi Cawn upon such a pretence. So much, says he, by Surajhul Dowla upon another. So much by Jaffier Ally Khan, upon another. So much, by Mr. Sykes, for Muttoot. And so much by the collectors of the East India Company on another pretext.

Having made the sum total of those, he makes his deductions; such a tax taken off by Jaffier Ally Khan: such another by the East India Company: and having made such deductions, the remainder is what he is to pay.

Where arises this mode of keeping his accounts? Evidently upon this principle of natural justice, which he feels:

These new importations have been lain upon me oppressively, at the will and pleasure of the ruling power; a time may come of law, justice, and humanity:

> I will be able to shew what was the original payment, which I admit to be due from time immemorial. I will keep every imposition separate and distinct, together with the pretext upon which it was raised; that, when the time of justice and humanity shall come, there may be materials upon which it may be decided whether I have been rightfully burdened or not.

20

Rebuilding Self-Confidence and Prosperity in India

[Published in Jansatta, Delhi, 14.9.1998]

Last year we celebrated 50 years of India's political freedom from British rule. During the first few days of the celebration many expressed their views on the definition and parameters of freedom, including our ideology, value systems, science and technology, in the Lok Sabha as well as Rajya Sabha. At the end of the year, festivals on Indian art were held, with performances in music, dance and folk tales from different parts of the country. Intellectuals and artistes from neighbouring Buddhist countries also participated in the events. The recital of the Ramayana in Kashi, the Alha-Udal in Madhya Pradesh, and recital of the Bhagvada Gita in Kerala for a whole year were important events. Such celebrations in themselves are fine. But after 50 years of independence most people, perhaps even those who are holdings the reins of power in the country, feel that the achievements of the last 50 years are not good enough to lay the foundations for building a new India.

In 1942, when the Quit India movement was at its peak, the British as well as the American governments were seriously concerned about the future of India. In August 1942 the American President, F. D. Roosevelt, advised the British that irrespective of the decision they took regarding the future of India, they must in the interest of the West, ensure that India remains dependent and within the orbit of the West. Roosevelt went so far as to say that Indians could not be called Asiatics, that they were Indo-Europeans, almost like close relatives of Europe and America.

After independence, somehow, we started to follow the exact path as hoped for by Roosevelt. We became dependent on the West and were sucked into their orbit. By following the same old British systems of administration (in areas of education, hygiene, health, urban and rural planning,

judiciary, banking, stock markets, agriculture and animal husbandry) we not only distanced ourselves from the ideals of freedom and the country but also from 90 to 95 per cent of the people of India. The result of all this is evident today: only those close to the British created political and administrative systems are first class citizens, while all others, especially those living in the country, have as if become citizens of second grade. The courage, confidence and enthusiasm to build a new India, present in the people before 1947, has been largely wiped out in the last 50 years. In 1942 when President Roosevelt suggested that India should remain within the 'western orbit', the intention was certainly not to see a strong, prosperous and modern India such as the countries of the west. The western wish (especially of Roosevelt as well as of Clement Attlee of Britain) was that the Indian state, as it had been structured by British rule over 150-200 years, should walk in the path laid down by the West, and, as far as possible, should continue to be guided by western thought, methodology and institutional framework. But during 1945-47, even while following them, if we had the sense to understand exactly how Europe became powerful, there may have been a possibility to become like Europe or America, the way Japan became powerful between 1885-1930, and yet largely continued in the Japanese tradition. But we did not comprehend this and unfortunately today India has become a very poor and crumpled copy of America and Europe.

The European mindset had already started influencing us by 1820. This increased gradually to such an extent that by 1900, the political, educational and commercial leadership was entirely in the hands of people dominated by western thought. Certainly, between 1915-1945, this influence decreased and became less dominant for 25-30 years. But after 1945, once again, leaders with a western mindset emerged in the forefront. In 1947, these leaders took over political control. The leaders who represented the ordinary Indian people and the people themselves, were largely marginalised, as they had been in the 150 years before 1915. The number and influence of the leaders with a western mindset has increased in the last 50 years. But these leaders have not been astute enough to comprehend the secret behind the power of control and the complexities of the European mind.

Today we are driving our society towards a state of complete domination by western thought, science, technology and systems, thereby completely subjugating our people and their environment and civilization in chains of bondage. From the times of Plato and Aristotle, the West has

believed that slavery is the most appropriate form of managing ordinary people and societies. Even the Greeks and the Christians believed in an anthropocentric world, where nature – its mountains, rivers, waterfalls, springs, seas, trees, animals, birds and insects – has been created for the sole purpose of being used by human beings. The Greeks, as well as the Old Testament of the Jews (which is accepted by both Christianity and Islam), even discriminates between human beings. Only some among them are considered human or fit to govern, while animals and nature are only to be exploited and enslaved. If the need arises the ruler is permitted to kill the ruled without any legal sanctions, just as one would kill a mad dog. In the last 100-200 years despite the change and prosperity of Europe and America, and the adult franchise which their people have obtained in the early 20th century, this mentality persists more or less undiminished. In such collective thinking, human and other living beings especially from other parts of the world could face annihilation whenever those who rule the West wish so.

If we wish to change this, then we have to begin to create a new India on the basis of the traditions, beliefs, knowledge systems and the nature of the people of our civilisation. We must decide to abandon the colonial systems and devices, with immediate effect. We must make plans so that we can become completely self-reliant and regenerate and consolidate our systems in the next 20-25 years, and if we don't wish to wholly destroy them, put all the British appendages and systems in the archives merely for academic interest and research.

We will have to begin afresh. We must accept the fact that the last 200-250 years were times of great misfortune and whatever happened during that period was very unfortunate for the Indian people. That does not mean, that we have to begin from what we had in 1700 or 1750. We could perhaps, make use of some of the changes which have taken place in the last 200-250 years, in our country. We could also make use of certain changes that have taken place in the world, in the last 50 years, but only that will be beneficial for us, which is in accordance with our thoughts, belief systems and our nature.

First of all, we must give priority to agriculture, forestry, and animal husbandry, as these are the material foundations of our society. We must consciously abandon the western systems and discover our traditional ways, seeds, crops, and irrigation systems and make modifications wherever necessary. We have to increase our food production, just the way it was in

India, before the 1800s. We must also ensure that none (men, animals or other living creatures) go hungry. In our belief system it is a curse if any person as well as any animal goes hungry.

It is extremely important that India stops importing grain, oil and other edibles as soon as possible. We can produce everything in this large country. Even if we fall short of a certain item then we must make do without it. If however, foreign nations require some of our produce, then we can negotiate and set some moderate limit and extent of such exports.

India was not limited to being an agrarian economy. Studies conducted in the last 10-20 years have revealed that around 1750, 73 per cent of the world's manufacturing output came from India and China. Even till 1830 this share was as high as 60 per cent. Therefore, we must have been producing innumerable things. We need to revive and re-establish this according to the requirement of the present times.

The upbringing and education of our children has deteriorated a great deal in the last 150-200 years. These need to be re-organised. A new beginning can definitely be made in the villages, small towns, and some mohalla-s of cities. The local youth will have to be mobilised for this. So, our second important priority must be to think about the kind of education we would like to impart and the ways to implement it. The aim of our education should be that 6-12 year old children become fairly familiar with nature, social and public activity, and the creatures living around them. During these six to seven years of learning, they must be able to appreciate nature and understand the lives and behaviour patterns of most living beings in order to appreciate and establish a friendly relationship with them. This, in turn, will familiarise them with the elements of science and technology, as well as with history, literature and philosophy. Once children are 12-13 years old, they must consider themselves full citizens of the country, village, town etc., in such a manner that they begin to participate fully and responsibly in all discussions and debates taking place in their society. They can easily be trained in livelihood skills in the succeeding two or three years. If in the next year or two, different books on history, geography, environment and living creatures could be written in 8-10 different languages of India, it would help in outlining the contents of appropriate curriculum for our education.

It is equally important to understand our neighbours in the East, South-East, North, and a few in the West with whom we have had close relationships for thousands of years. Also, as at present we are living in a

world dominated by Europe and America, it is essential to understand the beliefs and nature of these nations as well. Ideally, of course it would be best for all concerned, if we could keep a safe distance from the West for a long time to come, while maintaining a friendly relationship with them.

It is necessary that we re-establish close relationships with our neighbouring countries like China, Korea, Japan, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. In the last 500 years our relationships with most of these countries have been splintered by European policy and in time have largely broken down. However, the mindset and the nature of the people of these countries is very similar to our own. In fact, the influence of Ramayana, Mahabharata and the great Gautama Buddha in these countries has left a great mark upon their cultures. In many of these countries there are towns called Ayodhya, Mathura, etc. and some of them were their capital cities.

In order to understand and recognise our true selves, to achieve self-awareness, it is necessary to know the facts regarding our society and history. This work must be undertaken as soon as possible through Ph.D. and other programs in our institutes of higher learning. If in the next six to eight months such studies could begin to be conducted in at least ten to twenty areas/ districts of our country, then in the next five to seven years we should be able to collect considerable amount of information about the systems of our ancient society, its life, knowledge, skills, etc.

Revival of the new India is only possible if we understand our nature, tradition, beliefs, and value systems. It has been said that in order to fully comprehend the consequences of the Mahabharata war, our sages and other learned men sat in contemplation and deliberated for years in the woods of Naimisaranya, to understand the past while centering their attention on the future. The present times bear a close resemblance to the above-mentioned period of the Mahabharata. It is essential to keep our traditions, philosophy, and past events in mind while developing our ideas on the present. Three or four new educational institutes of advanced studies could be of much help in our endeavour to know the problems we face, and their nature, and present and future complications.

If philosophers and sociologists of all countries attempted to understand the present state of humanity and how it has been affected by the events of the last 500 years, it would be very useful for us all. We would then perhaps understand how and why the self-esteem of both men and

women has considerably decreased, how their loneliness and isolation has increased over the years and how each of them has become mere instruments of providing momentary pleasure to each other and nothing more. Perhaps with such an exercise, it would be possible to restore some of the lost self-esteem to men and women. A feeling of inter-dependence and community would once again be re-kindled within small groups, and laziness and cynicism of individuals would be considerably reduced. At the moment, all this seems remote if not impossible.

What seems possible yet, is to network with all those regions which came under Buddhist influence and regions influenced by Indian and Chinese belief systems (these include Japan, Korea, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Mongolia, certain regions of central Asia, Iran, Afghanistan and of course Pakistan and Bangladesh). In these regions it is possible to restore the self-esteem, community feeling and autonomy within small groups. It is imperative to revive the local economies especially in those regions which have been destroyed systematically in the last 200 or 300 years and where the majority of the people have been made to live in abject poverty for the last 150-200 years. However, if self-esteem, community feeling and regional autonomy is regained, economic prosperity will certainly follow and prosperity would acquire new meaning.

As far as India is concerned, its first priority should be to re-establish self-esteem, courage, community feeling, and collective freedom. This needs urgent attention. When this happens, the more complex problems will become clearer and begin to seem solvable, and we and our neighbours should be confident, prosperous, and relatively tolerant and friendly societies.

PART-3

Some European Characteristics & their Worldview Manifestations

21

On 500 Years of European Dominance

[Written in Bangalore, 19.6.1988]

Four years hence, 1992 would be the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Discovery of the World by Europe. It was in 1492 that Christopher Columbus, irrespective of whether he was of Portuguese, Italian, or some other European origin, supported by the financiers and the states of Europe found himself with his fleet on the coast of America. Europe had direct or indirect contact with north Africa, with parts of Asia, even with certain areas of east and west Africa from very early times, with some even from the days of European antiquity. But a new discovering quest captured the imagination of the states and adventurers of Europe, perhaps in some manner produced by the events of the Black Death, from about the mid-fifteenth century A.D. and beginning with European incursions into west Africa. Within fifty years of this beginning, Europe had reached America, hitherto unknown to it, and before the end of the fifteenth century it had found a sea-passage to India, and began its acquaintance with south and south-east Africa, with the coast and islands of the Indian Ocean, and south, south-east, and east Asia. By 1550 Europe had become dominant not only in the relatively small territory around Goa in western India but also in Sri Lanka, and in various other lands and regions of south-east Asia. Within a hundred years of the Discovery of America, and of the sea-passage to the East it had begun to have a major impact on so distant and civilisational so different a land as Japan that by 1600 around 4,00,000 Japanese had been converted to Christianity. Japan consequently decided around 1640 to shut its borders to Europe except for maintaining a minimal technological and commercial contact with the Dutch who were permitted to visit one of Japan's seaports at regulated intervals.

Within a few decades of Columbus reaching America, and the establishment of European colonies and plantations near the coastal areas of the

Americas and on some of the Atlantic Ocean islands, Europe took to the extensive and planned capture and enslavement of black African men and women for importation into these colonies and plantations. At a rough estimate, of those captured around 80 per cent would have perished at various stages between their capture and reaching the shores of the Americas, or the Atlantic islands. During three hundred years of this vast importation of the men and women of Africa into the Americas it may again be roughly estimated that the number of persons captured and enslaved from western and central Africa may have been anywhere in the neighbourhood of 100 million. Incidentally, by the early nineteenth century when the abolition of the slave trade, not slavery itself, became a live issue in the West, the number of black Africans imported and surviving in North America seem to have far exceeded the North American European settlers.

From about 1600 onwards various states of Europe began to establish fortified settlements even in various parts of India. Similar and perhaps stronger fortifications were established at all the places on the western, southern, and eastern coasts of Africa, as also on islands on the way to the East which served as fuelling, watering and halting places for the ships of Europe. The early impact of Europe in India may be gauged from the fact that the rulers of the great Vijayanagar had begun to rely on the Portuguese for arms, and Jahangir was seeking British help in clearing the sea routes of what were termed as pirates, between Western India, on the one hand, and Persian Gulf and Arabia, on the other. It is worth noting that much before 1700, Arracan, in southern Burma, had a British harbour-master.

By 1700, or at the most by 1750, European dominance and power had been fully established in the Americas, even when persons of European origin there were still a relatively small minority. The estimated population of the original inhabitants of the Americas is between nine to eleven crores at the time of Columbus. By 1700 a large proportion, perhaps even half, might have perished through war, through exposure to European diseases and through large-scale slaughter of the unarmed. Their virtual final elimination, however, became possible only in the later decades of the nineteenth century.

After 1700 Europe's major attention could be devoted to the East. One of the centres of such attention was India. Here European presence and power began to be effective from about 1700, and by 1750 Europe had seriously launched on India's total conquest. Around the same time Europe 'discovered' Australasia, and the islands around it. Soon after 1800, Europe

had started its incursions into China and by 1850 Europe had actual mastery over the whole world.

Europe's dominance is by no means the first in man's history. Islam had dominated much of the world for many centuries. The destruction and disruption which the expansion of Islam brought about, might have been on a similar scale.

Before Islam, Buddhism, or the message of the Buddha, seemed to have had a similarly extensive impact, but without any known violence, at least in most of Asia, and in parts of Asia the institutions and attitudes arising from Buddhism are still very much alive. Civilisational, India itself seems to have affected large parts of Asia including Tibet, Burma, South-east Asia, and even large tracts of central Asia. It is also quite possible that India as well as many other civilisations also had urges, or fancies, of world conquest and dominance. But none of them seem to have had the drive, the necessary innovative capacities, or the killer urge, to make such fancies come true. Judged from this angle, the five hundred years of European dominance of the world may be considered as wholly unique in world history.

The nature of this domination and its impact at various levels, and on man as well as other beings, fauna and flora require understanding and evaluation, especially from the standpoint of the dominated. The impact of European dominance has not merely been restricted to the political, economic and ecological planes, it seems to have affected the self-image of the dominated and even their psychic life. Similarly, the dominant themselves also have been affected by their own role, by what they did, how they did it, and the consequences of it all on their inner being. But it is possible that the effect on the dominant is merely quantitative in nature and that Europe had had all the tendencies it has displayed since Columbus in an ample degree, but at most earlier periods in relatively less manifest forms. The 'Discovery' gave Europe the opportunity for the unrestricted and extensive manifestation of what Europe had been contemplating and working towards from the time of Rome, or Plato, and possibly from much earlier. It is quite possible that certain other civilisations were equally taken up with these urges, only we know little about them and far more about Europe. If so, that has to be known and realised and the whole put in better a perspective. But as we still live under European dominance and the conceptual and institutional frame created by it, this question has much more than a historical and philosophical relevance.

Understanding the past five hundred years may lead the dominated to the path of self-discovery and thus enable them to reconstitute their social, spiritual and civilisational identity.

22

Europe and the Non-European World Since 1492

[Presented at the Seminar on "Environment and Development" at Bremen, Germany, April 1992]

To comprehend the concepts of environment and development, their varying meanings from different standpoints and their seemingly unending clash, one has to go back several centuries. An attempt is made in this paper to provide a backdrop to our present dilemma by briefly looking at the major events of the past five centuries, especially as represented by the experience of India. We also have to see how the world has been affected by what has happened in terms of thought processes as well as events since about 1492. This attempt may in some little way help us to better comprehend, and perhaps suggest steps to resolve, the dilemmas we face.

I

Discovery of the non-European World by Europe

The modern discovery of the non-European world by Europe began five hundred years ago when Christopher Columbus and his sailors found themselves on the coast of the Americas in 1492. Columbus' search, as that of several other contemporary European navigators was, in fact, for a sea passage to India and to the lands of south-east Asia. The new theory which some European scientists had propounded some years earlier that the earth was like a sphere encouraged Columbus to sail westward in the hope of ultimately reaching the eastern lands like India and others in the Indian region. Western Europe till then had no idea that a vast continent, named America around 1550 A.D., stretching more or less from the North Pole to the South Pole, lay in between Europe and Africa on the one hand and China and India on the other.

Such, however, was the drive of late fifteenth century Europe, perhaps in some way linked to the events of the Black Death which had swept Europe for about a century till around 1450, that merely six years later in 1498 a sea passage to India was found by going eastward around Africa. The finding of this passage may have been helped by Asian navigators, who are said to have assisted Vasco da Gama in reaching Calicut on the Kerala coast of India in 1498. In another forty to fifty years, Europe had more or less encircled the earth. A dramatic example of this encircling was the presence of the members of the newly established Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, in places as distant and civilisationally as distinct from Europe as Japan, by around 1540. A further demonstration of the European drive and vigour is provided by the fact that hardly sixty years later by the early seventeenth century, around 4,00,000 Japanese had been converted to Christianity through the labours of the Jesuits.

II

Before 1492, Europe, as it came to be known in the sixteenth century, had interactions with the lands of West Asia, of Persia, even with certain border areas of India and with North Africa, since antiquity. It is believed that Rome had mutual trade with coastal Tamil Nadu in south India around the beginning of the Christian era. Similarly, the western parts of China seem to have been known to Europe since the seventh century.

The phenomena of discovery, conquest, expansion, etc. do not begin with 1492. These may be as old as the beginning of man on earth. The young adventurer, Alexander, is said to have entered north-western India as early as 326 B.C., although he did not succeed in bringing any significant part of India under Greek dominance. About a thousand years later, in the seventh century, the Arabs under the banner of Islam reached and conquered parts of southern Europe as well as Sindh in western India. Later at the end of the eleventh century, during the time of the Crusades, Europe conquered, occupied and ruled large parts of Byzantium, West Asia and the older lands of Turkey. In this, it was supported by the Roman Christian church and led by the sons of west European landed aristocracy.

India, it seems, did not engage in such widespread conquest, perhaps because it had every material thing it wanted within its own vast and fertile land. Or, it may be that India did not have such ambitions and inclinations, or it lacked the crusading zeal necessary for such adventures. Yet, its scholars, pundits and Buddhist bhiksu-s seem to have travelled to and set-

tled in various parts of Asia as early as the beginning of the Indian Vikrami era, over 2,000 years ago.

III

The Expansion of Europe

The discoveries, conquests and expansions of Europe since 1492 evidently belong to a different genre. It is possible that the methodology of these conquests was not very different from that which the states of ancient Greece or Rome had pursued in the days of European antiquity. The methodology of conquest which the British adopted from about the sixteenth century seems in many ways quite akin to what William the Conqueror and his successors had adopted from the mid-eleventh century onwards in the conquest and subordination of England. The major vehicles of the post mid-fifteenth century European worldwide conquests, however, were the merchant and trading companies. For the eleventh to fourteenth century crusades, the religious and military orders of medieval European Christianity served as agents for extending conquest and subsequent consolidation.

A pre-1492 instance of the new methodology of conquest is provided by a charter of Henry VII of England issued in 1482. It granted to one John Cabot and his sons the licence to occupy and set up the King's banners and ensigns, "in any town, city, castle, island or mainland whatsoever, newly found by them" anywhere in the "eastern, western and northern sea...", belonging to "...heathens and infidels, in whatsoever part of the world placed, which before this time were unknown to all Christians." The King empowered them to "...conquer, occupy and possess..." all such places, the main condition being that they will give in turn to the King "...the fifth part of the whole capital gained..." in every voyage by their enterprise. There were innumerable such charters issued by the various rulers of Europe from about 1450 and extending more or less to our own times.

An interesting instance of the new methodology practiced by England is illustrated by its relationship with its neighbour, Ireland. Writing in the early seventeenth century, Sir John Davies, English attorney-general for Ireland, suggested the following as a more effective policy for Ireland: "The defects which hindered the Perfection of the Conquest of Ireland were of two kinds, and consisted: first, in the faint prosecution of the War, and next, in the looseness of the civil Government. For, the husbandman must first break the Land, before it be made capable of good seed; and when it

is thoroughly broken and manured, if he do not forthwith cast good seed into it, it will grow wild again, and bear nothing but Weeds. So a barbarous Country must be first broken by a War, before it will be capable of good Government; and when it is fully subdued and conquered, if it be not well-planted and governed after the Conquest, it will off-soonest return to the former Barbarism."

IV

From about 1500, Europe was expanding not only in the west but towards the east as well. In the west, its targets were the vast lands of the Americas, and their mineral and forest wealth. This led to the increasing settlement of the people of Europe on the islands near the Americas as well as on the eastern mainland of north, central and south America. The indigenous people who inhabited the Americas at the time of its European discovery in 1492, are estimated to have numbered around 90 to 112 million. The population of Europe then was around 60 to 70 million.

Innumerable wars were waged on the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas over some 400 years, till practically all of them were physically annihilated. Attempts were made to enslave them and to use them as labour in mining, on the newly started plantations, and in similar other occupations. But this did not work out. Practically, all of them seemed to have preferred annihilation to slavery.

Even more than the wars with the newcomers of Europe, it was the diseases of Europe, carried to the Americas by European men and their accompaniments, that were fatal to the people of America. The populations of whole regions were wiped out after they were visited by the newcomers. For instance, there, was a major plague in New England in North America, around 1618. Before the contact with Europe the people of the Americas were not exposed to, and therefore had no immunity against, many of the malignant diseases which had ravaged the European world: smallpox and measles, and very likely, tuberculosis, malaria, yellow fever, typhoid, typhus and various venereal infections.

To one Englishman who arrived in New England in 1625, "...the large scale elimination of the original inhabitants appeared to be the work of Providence." He thought that such elimination made the region, "...so much more fit for the English nation to inhabit it, and erect in it temples to the Glory of God." Around the same time another Englishman report-

ed, "God had laid open this country for us, and slain the most parts of the inhabitants by cruel wars and a mortal disease." Fifty years later a description of New York stated, "It hath been generally observed that where the English come to settle, a Divine Hand makes way for them, by removing or cutting off the Indians either by Wars one with the other, or by some raging mortal Disease." And the writer added that, "...it is to be admired, how strangely they have decreased by the Hand of God, since the English first settling of those parts; for since my time, where there were six towns, they are reduced to two small villages..."

By the mid-eighteenth century, perhaps from a much earlier date, some of the European diseases, like smallpox and a variety of plagues, seem to have been consciously and deliberately introduced by the newcomers amongst the indigenous American people. In 1763, at any rate, smallpox was consciously and deliberately introduced in North America by the British military commander when he gave orders that he "wished to hear of no prisoners should any of the villains be met with in arms", and added that "he had heard that smallpox had broken out at Fort Pitt and wondered whether the disease could not be spread to good advantage." To this one of his military colonels replied, "I will try to inoculate the bastards with some blankets that may fall in their hands and take care not to get the disease myself..." The twentieth century practice of introducing fatal human, animal and plant diseases amongst the enemy seems to have fairly old European precedents.

V

The discovery and occupation of the Americas created an urgent need for labour. As the indigenous people of the Americas could not be made to undertake such labour, and as European men on their own could not manage the mines, cut the forests, or run the plantations, Europe began to capture the youths and adults of western and central Black Africa, and those who survived the violence of capture were forced into slavery. They were then shipped to the Americas. The number of those who actually reached the shores of America, or the Atlantic islands from about 1500 to 1870 is estimated on the basis of shipping records, to have been around 10 million. Taking into account the casualties in the varied processes of capturing, in transporting from inland to the African coast, in loading into ships, and of those who perished on the ships during the long voyages, the total black African population actually involved in the whole process might have been,

at a moderate estimate, around 50 million. It could possibly have been even as high as 100 million. This estimate, however, does not take account of the disruption in the social structure of the affected areas of Africa, of the large scale deprivation of adult males in these societies, and of the new diseases which European intrusion would have introduced into Africa.

By 1770, the proportion of these enslaved persons in the total population of the British and French Caribbean was 91 per cent, in North America 22 per cent, and in the southern United States 40 per cent. In the USA, as it was then, it was 19.3 per cent of the total non-indigenous inhabitants in 1790, the people of European stock being around 80 per cent. The proportion of the African people in the United States of America went down to 11.8 per cent by 1900. The original inhabitants evidently were not counted at all either in 1790 or 1900.

In addition, European men and later women too, belonging to what were termed as the lower orders in Britain (the term was used till around 1900) were forced into a state of indenture for a number of years and shipped to the Americas. Being fellow Europeans, their condition and future was less harsh and held more promise, and after the period of indenture they were made free, given some land and allowed to work on their own. The annual emigration of such indentured servants from the English port of Bristol to North America was around 400 annually from 1655 to 1678, from London in 1684 it was 764, and from 1745 to 1775 the number of indentured servants who reached Annapolis in North America from Britain was 19,920. These latter included 9,360 who were termed convicts. The large scale indenturing of people from India in the nineteenth century and their being shipped to British possessions in south-east Asia, south Africa, and the Atlantic islands was only a replication and extension of this earlier European practice.

The institution of slavery had existed in Europe from the days of European antiquity. Slavery in the states of ancient Greece and in pre-Christian Rome seems to have been practiced on a massive scale. In Athens of circa 432 B.C., around the time of Socrates, the number of slaves is estimated at 1,15,000 out of a total population of 3,17,000. Besides, there were 3,8,000 Metics and their families. In Sparta the proportion of slaves is estimated to be far larger. In 371 B.C. Sparta, in the age of Plato, the number of Helots (slaves) ranged from 1,40,000 to 2,00,000 and of Perioeci (sort of slaves) from 40,000 to 60,000 in a total population of 1,90,000 to 2,70,000. The number of Spartiates (full citizens) was a mere 2,500 to

3,000, their families numbered from 7,000 to 9,000 and Spartiates with inferior rights numbered 1,500 to 2,000.

VI

Growing European Supremacy in Asia

Simultaneously, with Europe's expansion in the Americas, and its interventions in Africa, Europe was also expanding eastwards into the lands of Asia. Within ten to twelve years of the discovery of the sea passage to India, Europe had occupied Goa and the territory around it. The early impact of Europe in India may be gauged from the fact that by mid-sixteenth century the rulers of the great Vijayanagara had begun to rely on the Portuguese for arms, and by the early seventeenth century, Jahangir, the Mughal ruler of the Delhi empire, was seeking English help in clearing the sea routes, of those who were termed as pirates, between western India on the one hand and the Persian Gulf and Arabia on the other. By 1550 Europe's presence was being felt in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Thailand, the Indonesian islands and other neighbouring areas.

During the seventeenth century, Europe seems to have established its supremacy on the coasts of south and east Africa, Arabia, India, and many other lands up to China. All this was done through the medium of the various East India companies which had been sponsored, or given charters by the various states of Europe, and had the protection of their naval as well as land forces.

According to a contemporary writer, the English "had places of trust conferred upon them, both in civil and military branches" of the government of Siam (Thailand) much before 1687. One Englishman "was Shawbandar or custom-master at Mirju and Tanacarim", and another Englishman was as high as "admiral of the King's fleet". The Dutch and the Portuguese who had greater influence in south-east Asia in the seventeenth century might have held many more such situations in the areas where they were dominant.

While the large-scale division of Africa amongst the European nations dates to the latter half of the nineteenth century, European penetration and domination in Black Africa goes back to the early sixteenth century. Staging posts were established at various points on the African coast – west, south and east – soon after the discovery of the passage to India and to south-east and east Asia. Enslavement of the Africans for transportation,

firstly from about 1450 to the islands around the Mediterranean and then to the Americas, led to European penetration into the heart of Africa. The discovery of areas suitable for European colonisation and of mineral wealth, initially in South Africa, made the dominance complete. For many areas this had happened by about 1700.

During the latter part of the eighteenth century, Europe penetrated into Australasia, and the islands around it. What had happened in the Americas was replicated here.

Till about 1700, there were no major European incursions into the mainland of India. India, perhaps was too vast and too complex, and China even more so. So the attempt seems to have been aimed at encircling India first, to cut its links with other lands, and then, when the opportunity offered, to directly conquer it. While the incursions began by the early eighteenth century, the major offensive to conquer areas of India started only about 1750, initially in the Madras area, and ten years later in Bengal. From then onwards the process of conquest continued for nearly a century till about 1850. China was even vaster and more inaccessible than India, and European incursions into China consequently began later, after 1800. By 1850 Europe had gained mastery over the whole world.

VII

Introduction to Indian Society and Polity

In comparison to the near total annihilation of the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, and later of those of Australia, the very violent disruption of political, social and cultural life in western and central Africa where young and adult males were treated as merchandise, the treatment of Asia by Europe looks fairly mild. The natural descendants of the people who inhabited the lands of Asia before 1498, when Europe discovered the sea passage to them, continue to inhabit these lands even 500 years later. The impact of Europe on the Asian lands, however, was accompanied by continual violence, and while their people physically survived the European onslaught, their social and mental disruption over time went much deeper.

The nature of the non-European societies and the distinctive impact upon them can perhaps be well illustrated by a reference to India. One of the major characteristics of India has been its emphasis on communities based on shared localities as well as relations of kinship termed as jati-s, in contrast to the preference for individuation in non-Slav Europe. The num-

ber of localities in the India of 1947 was around 7,00,000. Their number a thousand or two thousand years earlier, might not have been very different. The number of the main jati-s, sometimes with different names in differing regions of India, is, however, not more than one hundred. One of the characteristics of jati-s is the sharing of one or more specific occupations amongst those who at some earlier period would have got admitted to it. A sort of interrelatedness or complementarity of the jati-s and also of localities makes up Indian society. This not only applies to the Hindus, who even today form some 85 per cent of the Indian people, those who have been converted to Islam and Christianity in the past 800 and 200 years respectively are organised and interlinked more or less similarly.

Given this characteristic of jati, India basically has been a society of consensus amongst the groups living in any particular region or locality. It was complementarity and relatedness amongst groups within localities, and more so within regions, which has shaped India's polity for the past two thousand years and more. This interrelatedness and the consensus, which grew out of it, seem to be the major elements that define the Indian concept of *dharma*. Indian civilisation is based on this sense of *dharma* and a shared view of the past. It is not as if there were no tensions or differences between locality and locality, region and adjoining regions, or between the various interpretations of *dharma*. The Indian mind, however, seems to have been moulded by a common basic approach to life and phenomena, and this has ordinarily overridden the local tensions and differences.

Given such characteristics, India has been a slow moving society, a society not easily disturbed by events. Consensus, equivalence and balance have been more important to India than the most alluring images of a new future. It is not as if no movement or change occurs at all. But the change, or rather the movement, socially acceptable in India, has been such that it does not destroy the consensus and the balance. Hence, the role of the polity in India was not that of a guide, or that of superman as preferred by Plato, or of a controller but merely of performing the task of an administrator functioning in accordance with the customs and preferences of the locality or the region. This naturally led to a civilisational confederal polity in which, while its parts shared common basic ideas and features, one with the other, yet the linkages amongst them were considered loose and flexible. The ancient concept of *Chakravartin* seems to have been evolved to serve as a symbol of the confederal nature of India as well as of its shared civilisational expressions. The symbol of the *Chakravartin* also probably pro-

vided a sense of strength and invincibility to this confederal polity.

Such a polity seems to have served India well for a long, long time. Despite European theories about the non-Indian origin of the people of India, it is perhaps correct to say that India, the ancient region of Bharatavarsa, has been one of the least conquered areas on earth. It is not as if the people inhabiting it are necessarily of one ethnic stock. Some immigrants did enter India, largely through India's western land borders, from time to time. But till about the end of the twelfth century India was ruled by its own people and polities. Even the Islamic conquests and domination of part of India from the thirteenth century onwards to the early eighteenth century, did not in any basic way disturb the tenor of Indian society and its arrangements. The Islamic intervention, however, did make, as time passed, much of Indian society weaker and fearful, and uncertain of its own inner strength. Such weakness and sense of uncertainty also possibly has roots in some of India's ancient concepts. The sense of courage in India however was not wholly lost even till the early nineteenth century. During the period of early British dominance there was widespread resistance to what by Indian norms was considered unrighteousness. The major resistance was in the form of persuading the unrighteous, or the wrongdoer, of the unrighteousness of his conduct and make him return to the shared norm. The techniques adopted in current idiom were of non-cooperation, boycott, civil-disobedience, and what Mahatma Gandhi implied by the term satyagraha. Such resistance was expressed by the peasantry, the artisan classes, as well as by those who lived in towns and cities. A major instance of it was in 1810-11 in the ancient city of Varanasi, and in several other towns of the present Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where a tax on houses had been imposed by the British. Contemporary evidence suggests that various inhabitants of the Varanasi region, including the peasantry and the artisans, especially the metal workers and other technologists, were party to this unarmed resistance. Some 20,000 persons were reported to have sat on dharna in Varanasi for many days, and around 2,00,000 persons were reported to have gathered in the grounds adjoining the city. Even those who assisted in the cremation of the dead, had struck work and the dead were placed in the flowing Ganga without cremation rites Innumerable cases of such resistance are recorded during the early years of British rule and these occurred practically in all regions of India. There was major resistance against the British enhancement of the tax on salt in the city of Surat even as late as 1843.

Early British and European observations of seventeenth and eighteenth century India seem to suggest that till then it were not the people who were in awe of their rulers but, instead, it were the rulers who stood in awe of the people under their rule. If the ruler was considered unrighteous or unjust, the norm was to replace him. Such a norm also implied an in-built courtesy between the ruler and the ruled, and when one visited the other it was customary that each gave some gift to the other. The one who came to visit came with some gift, often nominal, and on departure was offered a gift, often a substantial one, from the host. Even persons appearing before judicial authority seem to have expected and received pan-supari (betel leaf and betel nut) at the time of their departure.

VIII

Coming to India's material culture, its manifestations are very visibly commemorated in India's still standing great temples, some of which go back at least to the sixth century; in the innumerable inscriptions India still possesses, like the early tenth century inscription at Uttiramerur near Madras relating to the organisation of the area's polity; in India's ancient small, medium and large water works; and in the large number of ancient iron pillars, like the well-known iron pillar at Delhi. Though most of the hitherto published material, both Indian and western, does not make much reference to it, such a material culture was still very manifest in most regions and localities of India around A.D. 1800. It is possible that it had declined in its excellence and sweep relative to the heights it had reached before the twelfth century. But even if it had lost its heights, it was still very extensive on the ground till about 1800.

India seems to have been divided fairly early in her history into some 400 smaller regions, now called districts, and into some 15 to 20 main linguistic and cultural regions. Most regions and districts of India continued to have spinning, dyeing, weaving and printing of cotton cloth, and of some silk and wool too, on a vast scale. Cloth was manufactured in practically all the 400 districts. Many districts of south India had 10,000 to 20,000 looms in each district even around 1810. Similarly, it seems that at a moderate estimate, India had some 10,000 furnaces for the manufacture of iron and steel. Indian steel was considered of very high quality and in the early decades of the nineteenth century, it was being used by the British for the making of surgical instruments. Each of these small portable furnaces had the capacity to produce about 20 tons of good iron in 40 weeks

of operation in a year.

There were large numbers of silversmiths and goldsmiths, bronze and brass workers, and people who worked in various other metals. Similarly, there were those who mined the ores, undertook the manufacture of various metals, and engaged in stone-quarrying. There were carvers of stones, painters, builders, and many others. Besides, there were manufacturers of sugar, of salt, of oil (perhaps up to 1 per cent of the people), and manufacturers of many other commodities. Crafts and industry seem to have employed some 15 to 25 per cent of the Indian people, the proportion varying from region to region, before and around 1800. In addition, there was part-time spinning of cotton yarn. Eight hours of weaving on a loom would have ordinarily needed about 25 hours of spinning on the spinning wheel. As the number of weaver households was around 5 per cent of the total households, it seems that most households of India would have engaged in some spinning throughout the year.

Regarding the health of human beings, as also of domestic animals, Indians had a well-established ancient system of medicine and surgery. Basic plastic surgery and surgical operation of cataract, etc. were being performed in various parts of India till around 1800. Incidentally, modem plastic surgery in Britain is stated by its inventor to have been derived from and developed after the observation and study of the Indian practice from 1790 onwards. The widespread Indian practice of inoculation against smallpox was also observed and described in detail by British visitors or residents in India around mid-eighteenth century for the benefit of British medical men.

It may be added that practically all detailed description of each and every Indian practice communicated by British observers and specialists to Britain was with a view to the improvement of such practice in Britain or suggesting that the adoption of a specific practice would be beneficial. A detailed communication to the British Royal Society by a British commander-in-chief in Bengal, around 1770, was of the latter type. It related to the process of the artificial manufacture of ice in the relatively warm climate of the Allahabad region. Instances of the former are many. Some seed drills were sent from south India to the Board of Agriculture in London around 1795 so as to help improve the newly introduced British seed drill. Details of the process and ingredients of Indian mortar and dyes, and of the manufacture of steel communicated to Britain seem to have been aimed at improvement in the then existing British practices. When Britain

started the education of its ordinary children around 1800, it had to initially depend on the monitorial method of imparting school education as it was practiced in India and noticed by Europeans during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The major occupation of the Indian people was agriculture, and along with it, animal husbandry. However, in most regions no more than half of India's people were engaged in agriculture directly. As mentioned above, the tools of agriculture were of high sophistication. But so also seem to have been various agricultural practices, including the selection of the seeds used, their preservation, the manuring of land, the cropping patterns and the methods of irrigation. Through their sophisticated practices and implements, the peasants of India were able to obtain rather high yields. According to an 1803 British review comparing agricultural production in the Allahabad-Varanasi region with that of lands in Britain, it was found that the Indian production of wheat was about three times that in Britain. Recent ongoing research pertaining to the district of Chengalpattu in Tamil Nadu seems to suggest that the average production of paddy in this district around 1770 was around 3-4 tons per hectare, and the best lands in the district produced 6 tons and more per hectare. It may be mentioned that the high yields of paddy production in the world today are around 6 tons per hectare.

A certain balance and equivalence may also be deduced from the consumption pattern around 1800 A.D. A detailed description of it in 1806 is available from the districts of Bellary and Cuddapah. The whole population was divided into three classes: the high, the families of medium means and those of low means. In the Bellary district the population in the high category totalled 2,59,568; of the medium means 3,72,887; and of those of low means 2,18,684. Their annual consumption expenditure per family in money value was in the proportion of 69:37:30. Every family consumed the same amount of food-grains, but of differing quality and variety according to the class. The consumption list included 24 items. The consumption of ghee (clarified butter) and oil was in the proportion of 3:1:1 approximately, and of pulses in the proportion of 8:4:3.

IX

The society and political economy of mid-eighteenth-century India is perhaps well represented and illustrated by the information recorded in a detailed survey of the district of Chengalpattu, in Tamil Nadu, during 1767-

1774. While very detailed, the survey was the first of its kind, and was done by the British, who till then were not too familiar with the intricacies of Indian society, and its production methods and industrial infrastructure. The data from this survey may, therefore, be treated as an approximation to the ground reality, but it is possible that it missed certain things which existed on the ground or understated many others. An obvious understatement, for instance, pertains to the number of salt-manufacturers, which are given as 39, while the district of Chengalpattu had a coastline of over 100 kilometres, and salt pans covering an area of over 2,000 hectares. It is possible that in this case the survey recorded only those who were engaged in the supervision of salt-manufacture and not the number of actual manufacturers.

The following tables taken from this data may be helpful in comprehending the society of Chengalpattu circa 1770, and thus the society of India as it was till the latter part of the eighteenth century.

1. Land Distribution for 1810 Localities (in kani-s)
(one kani is a little more than 0.5 hectares)

Total Land	7,79,132
Under hills and rivers	36,099
Waste	84,973
Salt-pans	4,190
Irrigation sources (lakes, tanks etc.)	1,00,806
Wood	1,30,790
Tope (groves/plantations)	14,055
Habitat	24,088
Uncultivated irrigated land	58,667
Uncultivated unirrigated land	50,622
Cultivated irrigated land	1,82,172
Cultivated unirrigated land	88,069

Out of the total cultivated land a substantial proportion was known as manyam, (in Bengal, as cakran and bazee zamin), that is the cultivated land the land-tax of which had been assigned, usually in perpetuity, to the sustenance and support of various administrative, economic, cultural and religious functions, institutions and persons. The amount of such cultivated manyam-s in 1770 Chengalpattu was 44,057 kani-s of irrigated and 22,684

kani-s of unirrigated lands. In many other areas, both in north and south India, about half of the cultivated land had, in the course of time, but perhaps most of it by the tenth to the twelfth century, been assigned as manyam-s. The number of institutions and persons having such rights in any district ran into tens of thousands, and in one district in Bengal, there were over 70,000 claimants of such assignments around 1770 A.D.

2. Total Number of Cattle, Goats and Sheep
(for 1544 localities)

Cows	94,685
Buffaloes	5,417
Goats	14,931
Sheep	14,970
Bullocks	59,550

3. Distribution of Various Occupations
(for 1544 localities)

Total Households	62,529
Peasantry and Cattle-keeping	**33,963**
Vellalas	7,411
Pallys	9,693
Pariars	11,052
Reddys	1,417
Kammawars	1,005
Cow-keepers	2,573
Shanars	812
Craft and Industry	**8,234**
Weavers	4,011
Cotton-refiners	85
Carpenters	536
Ironsmiths	394
Artificers	45
Brasiers	36
Goldsmiths and Silversmiths	209
Vegetable oil manufacturers	637

Pot-makers	389
Wood-cutters	596
Salt manufacturers	39
Fishermen	590
Shoemakers	78
Stone-cutters	89
Others (approx.)	500
Merchants and Banking	**4,312**
Chettis	2,051
Other traders	1,839
Shroffs (Banking)	422
Essential Services	**1,685**
Barbers	664
Washermen	862
Medical men	159
Scholarships, Higher Learning Ritual Performances and Culture	**8,684**
Brahmins	6,646
Pandarams	1,054
Devadasis	622
Valluvans	137
Wochuns	173
Musicians	27
Kootadi (stage performers)	25
Administration and Police	**2,681**
Kanakkapillai (Registry/Record Keeping/Accountancy)	1,660
Panisevans	314
Taliars	707
Militia System	**1,479**
Muslims	733
Moormen	671
Fakirs	62
Remaining Other Households	**748**

Allocation of Produce

Besides the assignments of the tax from manyam lands (or from the cakranand bazee zameen in north India) to various institutions and persons, many of the same institutions and persons, and many others, also received a share of the gross agricultural produce, and quite possibly similar shares from the incomes of those engaged in non-agricultural activities, like commerce, finance and industry. It seems that a quarter of the total gross agricultural production was so allocated, and these allocations, starting from the allocation to the main local temple or shrine, were the first charge on the production. In Chengalpattu these allocations were around 27 per cent of the total gross agriculture production of the district. The following table indicates the major allocations worked out on the basis of production data of 1,458 localities in kalam-s, for a variety of institutions and persons. (One kalam is roughly equal to 125 kilograms).

Total Agricultural Produce	**14,79,646**
Total Allocations	**3,94,950**
For institutions and occupations within each locality	2,64,824
Local kovils (temples, shrines)	13,882
Padarams/Devdasis/Astrologers	18,503
Cultivator Servants	87,504
(possibly majority of them were from amongst the Pariars)	
Irrigation fund	19,806
Artificers (Carpenters/Ironsmiths)	19,470
Potters	2,749
Barbers	6,169
Washermen	6,058
Corn-measurers	11,561
Shroffs	9,332
Kanakapallais	31,624
Panisevans	3,110
Tottys	1,371
Chief inhabitants	31,197
Various others	2,488

For outside institutions and persons	1,30,126
Great kovils/mathams (places of higher learning/scholars)	25,321
Administration	53,572
Palayakkarans (Militia)	45,936
Fakirs/Mosques/Dargarhs	2,518
Various others	2,779

X

Along with the degradation of the dignity of the Indian people and the disorganisation of their agriculture, education, industry, and technology, etc., there also took place an extensive destruction of the physical resources, and degradation of the natural environment. To an extent, the degradation of the forests and the water sources, in large parts of India was the result of deprivation of resources from and of in attention to them following the establishment of an alien order. But it is also known that British Indian forest policy, as European policy elsewhere, saw forests of India as reservoirs of accumulated wealth, which needed to be mined and transported to Europe. As early as 1750 to 1800, timber syndicates by private Europeans were formed in many parts of India, especially in Malabar, whose forests were said to be inexhaustible. From around 1805 London insisted on direct government control of all forests. When parts of Burma were annexed by the British in 1826, after the defeat of Burma in the first Anglo-Burmese war, the forests there were declared to be government property straight away. And, from the port of Moulmein alone one million tons of teak was exported during 1840 to 1848. From the 1850s the development of railways and other industrial needs of Britain put far larger demands on Indian forests. Thus, arose the forest policy and the forest legislations, which in a period of twenty-five years between 1855 to 1880, made the entire forest wealth of India into British state property. But this exploitation of forests as reservoirs of accumulated wealth and their consequent destruction was perhaps not peculiar to British policy in India, it merely being a replication of what was being done in Europe and the Americas. But it was executed much more ruthlessly in India. Europe looked upon nature as merely a material resource provided by the creator for human exploitation. This assumption led to intense destruction of forests in Europe. By the end of the seventeenth century only, one-seventh of England was wooded but by 1823 this proportion had come down to

1/23rd; in France 1/ 12th of the land was under wood by 1800.

By the early 1840s, decay was spreading in the political economy of India at a much faster pace. Around the same time information had reached London from North America that the wholesale destruction of forests there had an adverse effect on rainfall. This made London anxious and the British governments in Bengal, Bombay and Madras were asked to make proper inquiries about the matter. The matter was inquired into in the Madras Presidency and most of the British officers in the districts agreed with the widely held Indian opinion that there was more rainfall in mountains and forests than in the areas bereft of forests. In 1849 the Madras Board of Revenue and the government of Madras, however, came to somewhat different conclusions. Their conclusions were:

"1. That extensive tracts of ground covered with trees in the level countries of India have not the power of producing rain.

"2. That while their effect on the climate and productiveness of the country is problematical all large tracts of jungle in tropical climates are known to produce most fatal malaria and fever.

"3. That if the country was planted to such an extent as might be supposed likely to be productive of rain, the result in a sanitary point of view might be more pernicious on the climate of India in which there are already so many noxious effluvia."

With such reasoning upheld as an environmental principle, deforestation gained a new legitimacy.

XI

Enforced Decay of Indian Society

The wars waged by the British, French, and earlier by the Portuguese in different parts of India led to frequent widespread plunder and chaos. During 1750-1800 many of India's rulers saved their people and territories by offering such amounts of money to the British and the French which the invaders claimed they would have had from the plunder of the particular territory. Others who became subordinated to the conquerors, but not yet formally dispossessed of their territories, were made to pay for the conqueror's armed forces, and further were expected to keep the commanders, other officers and influential British and French persons in good humour. As and when such rulers had no cash resources left they were made to bor-

row cash from the British military commanders and other men who had amassed large wealth or wielded political power for defraying such imposed expenses. The borrowed sum was repaid with interest of around 50 per cent per annum. For repayment of these sums such subordinated rulers had either to greatly enhance the rates of taxes, especially the tax on land, in their territory, or had to surrender particular areas to the respective lenders, so that the latter could extract the maximum from the area towards the recovery of the amount which he claimed was owed to him.

Overwhelmed by the organisational skills of Europe, and helped by the breakdown of the morale and institutions of the conquered, the society of India collapsed in most parts of the country. Most of the sources which had maintained the institutional structures of India through manyam-s, large allocations from the gross agricultural produce and so on, were in time taken over by the conquerors. The principle was that only that much must be left with the producer which would allow mere subsistence and that the complex Indian infrastructure must get disbanded. It was decided that not more than 5 per cent of the cultivated land should be treated as manyam, and no more than 5 per cent of the gross produce should be left with communities to be disposed of as allocations to institutions and persons.

As institutions appeared to be a greater threat to British dominance, these were treated far more harshly and attempts were made either to dismantle them through neglect and coercion, or to convert them into personal estates. Such a message from the highest British authority in India was conveyed even to the new Maharaja of Mysore, soon after the restoration of the ancient Mysore kingship in 1799. Such an approach was further accompanied with the enhancement in the rates of tax on land, and taxes on trades, occupations, and commodities. During the initial hundred years of British rule in most parts of India, the tax on land was enhanced to 50 per cent of the gross agricultural produce. Till then those who had received the tax from manyam lands (or cakranand bazee zamin) had been receiving no more than 12 to 16 per cent of the gross produce as their share. Matters, however, did not stop at the fixing of 50 per cent as tax on the gross agricultural produce. The decay of the political economy produced a long depression and the tax on some of the most fertile lands in time was much more than the value of their agricultural produce. Similar changes happened in industry and trade. In the meanwhile, as the resources for maintenance were terminated or greatly reduced public works, temples, *matham-s*, *chatram-s*, wells, tanks, in fact, the whole irrigation system of India, col-

lapsed by about 1840. Only when such a collapse began to substantially affect the receipts of the land tax, some repairs were started, largely through forced local labour, and some new irrigation works also began to be constructed. At this stage, it was decided to reduce the land tax from the theoretical 50 per cent to 33 per cent of the total gross produce. Such a step began to be implemented only sometime after 1860.

XII

With the collapse of the political economy and the social infrastructure, learning, sophistication, frequent public celebrations and festivals also went under. Literacy also declined. Yet, even in the relatively decayed 1820s, the number of school-age boys going to school in southern India was at least 25 per cent, and many more were educated in their homes. This proportion dwindled to no more than one-eighth, sixty years later in the 1880s. Scholarship and higher learning decayed even more. The process of alienation which by stages began to take hold of the literati of India, from about 1820, well-nigh eliminated most such scholarship and learning by about 1890 or 1900. By then it seemed that the soul of India had been fully entrapped.

Such a situation of physical emaciation and economic deprivation, on the one hand, and the breakdown of institutions and the alienation of the literati and the relatively prosperous, on the other, led to a major schism in Indian society. Prolonged subjugation produced a deep sense of inferiority amongst the conquered. Its consequence was the romanticisation of certain aspects of their own past and a misreading of what made Europe dominate them and their neighbours.

Initially, the romanticisation of the past was a sheer necessity for the survival of Indian civilisation and the concepts which most Indians still held on to. Further, amongst the ordinary people economic and cultural depression led to widespread mental confusion and rigidities, whilst amongst the literati and the prosperous, it led to the acquiring of new images of themselves and their civilisation which European scholarship on India endowed them with. It is possible that given a historically widespread literate intelligentsia, such an impact has been much more pronounced in India than elsewhere in the non-European world. However, amongst the well-known persons in the nineteenth and twentieth century public life of India, one person, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, seems to have remained unaffected by such an impact. In contrast, independent India's

first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, seems to represent this impact at its highest. The following is an illustration of the contrast:

> From 1930 to 1947 Indian nationalists observed 26 January as the day dedicated to the achievement of complete freedom of India. Since 1950 this day has been observed as Republic Day. During the pre-Independence period a long pledge was taken on this day by all those who observed it. The pledge said, "The British Government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom, but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally and spiritually." Further it added, "...we hold it to be a crime against man and God to submit any longer to a rule that has caused this fourfold disaster to our country." Regarding India's cultural ruination it stated: "...the system of education [established by the British] has torn us from our moorings and our training has made us hug the very chains that bind us." Like most other resolutions of the Indian freedom movement this pledge had also been drafted by Mahatma Gandhi. Earlier, in January 1928, Mahatma Gandhi had suggested that India's freedom would lead to the freedom of the other colonised and enslaved people of the world and stated that, "India's coming to her own will mean every nation doing likewise." As we all know, most other subjugated areas of the world in south-east Asia, Africa, etc., in one way or another, regained their political freedom within fifteen years of the withdrawal of British power from India.

Though most Indians subscribed to the belief that British rule had ruined India culturally and spiritually as well, many disagreed and continued to do so even after India achieved its freedom in 1947. Amongst the latter was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. While publicly he did not wish to challenge such a categorical statement, privately he expressed strong dissent as early as January 1928. In a letter to Mahatma Gandhi he wrote,

> "...you have stated it somewhere that India has nothing to learn from the West and that she had reached a pinnacle of wisdom in the past. I certainly disagree with this viewpoint. ...I think that western or rather industrial civilisation is bound to conquer India, maybe with many changes and adaptations, but none the less, in the main, based on industrialism. You have criticised strongly the many obvious defects of industrialism and hardly paid

> any attention to its merits. Everybody knows these defects and the Utopias and social theories are meant to remove them. It is the opinion of most thinkers in the West that these defects are not due to industrialism as such but to the capitalist system which is based on exploitation of others. I believe you have stated that in your opinion there is no necessary conflict between capital and labour. I think that under the capitalist system this conflict is unavoidable."

A similar view on western modernism was expressed, some fifteen years later, by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in reply to a letter of Mahatma Gandhi on the same theme. In his reply, Jawaharlal Nehru had also remarked,

> "I do not understand why a village should necessarily embody Truth and Non-violence. A village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally and no progress can be made from a backward environment. Narrow-minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent."

XIII

All modern western knowledge and theorisation about phenomena may be assumed to be derived from the same roots. This could be said not only about the disciplines included in the humanities and the social sciences, but also those included in the physical sciences. Of these, anthropology, or ethnography is the science which is exclusively concerned with the non-European conquered people. It is anthropology, and its allied disciplines, which grade non-European man and make him into a mere object. Professor Claude Levi-Strauss explains the nature of anthropology in the following words:

> "Anthropology is not a dispassionate science like astronomy, which springs from the contemplation of things at a distance. It is the outcome of a historical process which has made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other, and during which millions of innocent human beings have had their resources plundered and their institutions and beliefs destroyed, whilst they themselves were ruthlessly killed, thrown into bondage, and contaminated by diseases they were unable to resist. Anthropology is daughter to this era of violence; its capacity to assess more objectively the facts pertaining to the human condition reflects, on the epistemological

level, a state of affairs in which one part of mankind treated the other as an object.

"A situation of this kind cannot be soon forgotten, much less erased. It is not because of its mental endowments that only the Western world has given birth to Anthropology, but rather because exotic cultures, treated by us as mere things, could be studied accordingly, as things. We did not feel concerned by them whereas we cannot help their feeling concerned by us. Between our attitude towards them and their attitude towards us, there is and can be no parity."

What Professor Claude Levi Strauss said was not wholly new about the science of anthropology. Some eighty years earlier, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, acclaimed by some as the father of anthropology, had, in fact, defined the role of anthropology as that of destruction of the old cultures. Concluding his Primitive Culture, he had said, "It is a harsher, and at times even painful, office of ethnography to expose the remains of crude old cultures which have passed into harmful superstition, to mark these out for destruction. Yet this work, if less genial, is not less urgently needful for the good of mankind."

The above definition of anthropology and thus of the European approach to matter and men naturally had an impact on the alienated in the non-European world.

XIV

The non-European societies which came under the dominance of Europe seem to have shared a marked characteristic. All these societies may be said to have maintained a balance with the gods or spirits they prayed to, as well as with the flora and fauna and human groups and individuals which constituted them. This seems to be as much true of the pre-1492 societies of the Americas, as of the societies of Africa, south-east Asia, or India. In the case of India, this characteristic is perhaps even more pronounced given the complex nature and vastness of India and the variety of climate and landscape India has had. Such balance in any of these societies need not have been a static phenomenon. It could have had, especially in the case of India, a flowing and dynamic quality of its own. It is not only the accounts of Indian society at different times which seem to suggest it but also India's vast literature and India's concepts of kala and citta. Over a long period, a

society like that of India, seemed to have moved from one balanced state to another balanced state, but much more slowly. In contrast European societies from early times till the present, seem to have lacked such balance and appear to have within them an in-built tension and a pronounced hierarchical structure. In addition the aim of European civilisation seems to be to emphasize the partial at the cost of totality, with the result that European society seldom seems to acquire balance at any particular point of time. If so, this possibly could explain the aggression and the killer instinct of Europe.

It is possible that the world is now emerging, perhaps haltingly, with a newer vision and with greater feeling about the world-wide fraternity of human beings and has begun to realise the autonomy as well as unity of all creation. If so, such vision has to become more manifest and compelling. It will also require a sense of introspection in individuals, societies and states in the world of Europe as well as in the world of the non-European. Introspection and self-reflection may also help achieve the necessary state of repentance for the havoc of the past five centuries as well as lead to appropriate steps in putting an end to and setting right the accumulated damage.

Finally, while the worldwide havoc was started and fuelled by the skills of Europe, the non-European world by aping Europe made its own situation much worse. Till the European impact, the non-European man believing in the autonomy of all creation, and thus not treating himself as the master or controller of others had developed a relation of co-existence with the other constituents of creation. This attitude possibly did get converted at some stage into a state of indifference. The aping of Europe, however, made him into a mindless plunderer and torturer. The return to sanity, therefore, requires not only the introspection and repentance of Europe, but also of the non-European world.

23

Five Hundred Years of Western Dominance

[Modified text of an interview with Dr. Claude Alvares, 1992. Published in the Third World Network Features]

On 31 March, Indian President R. Venkatraman, arriving in Portugal, dubbed his trip 'a return visit for Vasco da Gama's visit to India'. Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut on 20 May 1498. Columbus landed in the Americas in 1492. The world over, academics, scholars and thinkers from North and South are beginning to reflect on the impact of the past five hundred years of western domination of the planet. The Latin Americans are protesting against any celebration of the fifth centenary, arguing that the West has mostly brought with it colonialism, slavery and sustained economic exploitation.

Shri Dharampal spoke to Dr. Claude Alvares on the significance of these past five hundred years.

Claude: The past five hundred years have been unmistakably spectacular. In 1492, a set of nations crossed their boundaries and took control of the globe. Nothing has been the same ever since. How would you see this period: have we benefited from the encounter with the West, or should our experience (and that of the planet as a whole) with the West be rather seen as a curse?

Dharampal: Five hundred years is a long period. And in a major way, maybe deep down, it has transformed the world, not only the conquered areas but the areas which undertook the conquest as well. The lifestyles of people in Europe in 1492 or 1498 were quite different, at least till the mid-nineteenth century, than they are now.

It seems that what the Europeans did through their endeavours and achievements, was to systematically try to transform societies and human beings. They played havoc with mankind and with the natural phenomena,

by conquering and remaking everything in their own image.

Claude: How would this compare with the outward voyages of Indians between 4th century B.C. and 6th century A.D.?

Dharampal: We Indians also did go around the world, especially to southeast Asia and to east and south Africa, but we may not have caused so much physical havoc. Our voyages are said to have been peaceful excursions, although the changes, which they may have brought about at the societal and thought level, must have been upsetting for a large number of people. The aims then were different; it was not to transform the physical world, or to plunder other societies but had something to do with the individual person and societies. So it did not cause havoc in the physical environment and it may not have caused great havoc in society.

But some major things would have happened. I think the relationship between state and society would have changed because of the Brahmanical and Buddhist conceptions of society – the relationship between the Sangha and the State. And this could have caused problems in Burma, south-east Asia etc.

But this Western intrusion commencing in 1492 was aggressive, and it somehow, as time passed, wanted to make all phenomena conform to the logic of western man. So it disorganised everything which led to wholesale violence because the purpose was to make people conform to a particular set-up designed by a few people. And in the meantime, these people with their notions were themselves changing rapidly from year to year, generation to generation, which added to the disorganisation and violence. Now, there were these physical consequences. There was this elimination of whole populations in the Americas and elsewhere.

I think what has happened, since 1492, is unique in history –history as we know it. Now its consequences have to be understood. Conquest either eliminates people or subordinates them completely. It rums them into a different type of human being and even after they get liberated, they take quite some time to come into their own.

This was understood by the West. Their philosophers would have written about it. There is considerable material available in the present time on the effect on people when they lose their freedom. They lose self-identity, honour and a sense of dignity. Probably these qualities return, but with time and effort.

I think what has happened in the past five hundred years cannot be

ignored. Note has to be taken and the period reflected upon. There need be no anger over this; other areas were also engaged in conquest, aggression etc., maybe to a smaller degree, lesser extent and for shorter durations.

Claude: What is the extent of the havoc, in physical or numerical terms? Have any realistic calculations been done? An American scholar recently caused an uproar by referring to the extermination of the indigenous population of North America as a 'holocaust'.

Dharampal: American experts themselves calculate that the population of indigenous American people at the time of Columbus in 1492 was between 90 and 112 million. There are higher estimates also in recent years. This would be more than the population of the whole of Europe at that time. Academic opinion is more or less agreed on this. If these indigenous American people were more in number than the people of Europe, then, if they had increased at the same rate as Europeans, they should have been at least equal to the number of people of European stock in the world today. People of European stock today, whether living in Europe, Americas or elsewhere, would be of the order of 1,200 million to 1,500 million. But the people of indigenous stock in the Americas today, would not be more than a few million; 30 million to 40 million, if the indigenous as well as those of mixed stock in South America are included. So, you can gauge the extent of the physical elimination. Similar things happened in Australia.

It happened in Africa too. It is said that the real disturbance in Africa started from the mid-19th century. Modern scholars of Africa do not think so. It started around 1450 when Europe began to have landing places on the West African coast. Europeans knew North Africa from Greek times, but the major European contact with West Africa was post-1450 and it grew fast from the time of Columbus, because they wanted to take away African men to the Americas to work as slaves.

The number of African people actually reaching both the Americas, as slaves, between the period when the capture of Africans commenced around 1500 or even earlier, till about 1830 when slavery was formally abolished, is to the tune of 10 million. And for each person who finally landed in the Americas or the West Indies, I think there would have been at least five persons who were captured from their homes and then by stages transported to the Americas. The remaining either got killed or perished in the process of transportation, because the death rate was very high during transportation, not only of the blacks but also of the whites who carried out the capture.

The slave trade would have disturbed whole societies in Africa. Internal conflicts would have arisen. Once some Africans started to co-operate with the whites, they themselves would have raided other areas, a thousand miles or more inland, to capture one another. This is not taken note of.

This must have changed the African man's idea of what the world and society is like. Over a period of time things must have changed radically, certain things would have been taken for granted.

Claude: What of the world of today, for example. How much of it is recognisably Western, and should people be bothered about it in any sense?

Dharampal: If you look at the world today for any length of time and from any corner, it appears that even in Japan or China – nations which are said to have self-identity – they desire a western lifestyle. Though there does not seem to be any rhyme or reason for it. It is sheer imitation. But this is certainly one very visible impact.

There must be impacts in various other things. In lifestyles, in what you produce, what you don't, what you give up.... Vegetarian food was the major food of the Eastern people, including people of Japan and south-east Asia. They were probably not strictly vegetarians in the Indian sense, but they were habitually vegetarians. The large-scale change to meat-eating is a phenomenon of the last few hundred years. So the food habits have changed. Agricultural patterns have changed. The concept of life would have changed.

If we do not reflect on this, then we assume that this is how life goes on, that this is part of the natural phenomena. But the present-day concern about the biosphere, about ecology, about environment etc. does indicate that thinking human beings today do feel that some major disturbances have taken place through the actions of man during the last 100, 200 or 500 years and that very major corrections have to be made.

Note has to be taken perhaps in a similar way the Latin Americans are reacting. But it should not be restricted just to a formal protest day. That will not do. One would have to go into deeper analysis, what happened to man, his society, his lifestyle, his vision of the universe, his ideas of relationships with others, and not only with human beings but plant life, animal life, rocks, water, whatever. Unless this is done, I don't think one can really apply any major corrective.

Claude: How can this transformation come about? The people who

should undertake this reflection are the product of this very five-hundred-year-old transformation. In other words, they are clones of western culture. They have no sense of their own inner worth or any inner spirit. Caricatures cannot make credible assessments. Unless you feel there is still something left within these human beings, their societies, that is still intact, that has not given way under the assault of the West.

Dharampal: But they may not be caricatures. Deep down in people there may be some substratum, some core element which does not get destroyed. It gets suppressed, probably.

There may be human beings who can emerge out of such disrupted situations – Mahatma Gandhi, for instance. He was a product of Indianness, but an Indianness which had been considerably westernized. He went to London and stayed there two, three years. Many other Indians also went to Britain before him, probably a few hundred Indians had done so. But the way he was affected was different from the way the others were affected. He came out of Britain, he watched, but he did not give up the western style of living immediately. That took him about twenty years – giving up western clothes and food habits, though he was a vegetarian all the time. I mean vegetarianism is not the main thing, it is how you do things. And he was doing most things the western way for almost twenty years after leaving Britain.

But he was probably reflecting, thinking all the time. He came out of it and he led one of the most indigenous political movements of the time, in a society which had broken down. If Mahatma Gandhi could do it, then hopefully others can do it too.

Perhaps such capacity is a privilege, but how that privilege comes about, I do not know. Maybe, it originates from deep down and this source does not disappear unless you physically eliminate the particular type of being.

But even at the level of societies, it is possible to emerge out from under the influence of conquerors. Take Japan for instance. It was a Buddhist society for something like 1,200 years. It is still nominally Buddhist but a large part of it has transformed; it has changed significantly. Perhaps, in the early seventeenth century when they felt threatened by Europe, the Japanese decided to close themselves, to meet the challenge of the West, they reflected and concluded that they needed to derive strength from their own sources and devise means and ways of ending the threat. By

closing Japan, they got about two hundred years from about 1640 to about 1860 when they were threatened with immense military force by the USA. During this period, there was a decline of Buddhism and a reversion to the Japanese idea.

We cannot do things with an ideological load of civilisation which is not one's own. This load may not have been imposed, one may have opted for it (as the Japanese did with Buddhism) but if it does not get rooted properly, it can become a burden at a certain stage when you have to handle a new situation. So, you have to throw it away and start afresh.

Claude: Japan is an extremely interesting case. Superficially, they seem to have repudiated their past and adapted themselves completely to the West. Today, the Japanese are recognisably western. Seen that way, one would think them fully conquered, fully incorporated within the western design.

Dharampal: I do not know if the scholars or academics in the western countries view the Japanese as western. To us they may look western, to Saudi Arabians they may look sestern, to blacks they may look Western. But whether they look sestern to westerners? They look powerful, innovative and so on to the Germans and to the French, but whether any German would accept the Japanese as one of them, I doubt it.

And how deep is this apparent westernism – the clothes, for obvious reasons and going abroad, the gadgetry etc. – how much of this is an essential part of the Japanese, I do not know. It may be that the two things are lying side by side. Suppose, a day comes when the originators of this whole paraphernalia, which has been collected, of gadgetry, of modem living etc., become indifferent to it and are no longer creative in this field. The moment they cease to be creative in this field, the basic impulse will disappear, and most of what had been created will collapse as by itself it has no life; it needs to be created all the time, newer and newer and newer, etc. Whether the Japanese would still keep it after such collapse – because then such imitation would be unnecessary – is a moot question. They have tried to meet the western man in his own way. Mahatma Gandhi tried to meet the western man in what he considered an Indian way. That is the difference between the ways of Mahatma Gandhi and those of Japan.

But, I think the Indianness or asmita of Mahatma Gandhi may be essentially of the same nature as the asmita of the Japanese. Because, if they did not have this in them, they could not have done it. And possessing

asmita, I suppose, is the main thing. I mean, if we had this and then we became western, it would have led us somewhere. But we don't seem to have it anymore.

It seems that by 1920 – some fifty years from the time they started industrialisation along western lines etc. – the Japanese were doing things better, shipyards, for instance, than the Americans. The Japanese, I have read somewhere, imported twenty railway steam engines from the Americans, and took one engine completely apart. The main idea was to understand what made the western thing tick.

This type of effort Mahatma Gandhi probably understood, but he seems to have rejected western contrivances, etc., being convinced that they were no good for man. The Japanese did not do that; they may have also felt that these contrivances were not good for man but perhaps felt that nothing could be done; that they could not survive by such rejection. They did not have that type of soul force, or whatever that Mahatma Gandhi had. But what happened after Mahatma Gandhi in India, really seems to suggest that the Japanese analysis and understanding of the situation was better than ours.

We may have apparently remained Indian, but our soul force became alienated. Many of us wear khadi - for fifty years now I have worn khadi - but our idiom, our way of looking at things, is largely western. We may sleep on the floor, sit on the floor, this is Indianness but it is not the root of Indianness. This is Indian ornamentation. But all that we have acquired is basically Western. But I must add that this is mainly true of the westernised Indian ruling class. The overwhelming majority of the Indian people still retain their *asmita*, their basic Indian manner and preferences, though perhaps with much less vitality.

Look at our shops and bazaars, even in small villages, there are practically no Indian goods. In the smallest towns in Uttar Pradesh and in remote villages, there are public notices drawing attention to the existence of English medium schools.

I think the Japanese did not allow themselves to get involved in such a situation. Theirs may not be the best way. But we do not know the best way. We have to think about it, look at what Mahatma Gandhi was trying to do and find out, based on his practice, what he did in various situations and why he did it. If we could understand that, then perhaps we could devise something – not merely a repetition of what Gandhiji did – which would

be indigenous. An Indian argument could then begin on how we should look at things and how to manage the affairs.

Claude: But why has it not started till now? After Gandhi, there seems to have been no commensurate effort in that direction. The predominant thrust among Indian leaders and thinkers was to make India western. Or that we could not survive unless we took aid from the West. Even extraordinary individuals like Swami Vivekananda held such views.

Dharampal: I think we are too demoralised. I think even the great Vivekananda, after he had gone around the country for about four years, from 1889 to 1893, and saw the wretchedness, the poverty, the impoverishment of the mind and attitudes and so on, was perplexed as to what had happened.

Then he went to the West and saw a different world and that made him feel that we could not do anything on our own. We have to have western aid, western muscular power, but what he meant was that we might require these things to stand up. He did not mean that it would be forever. He meant that we needed such support in the next generation or so, ten, twenty, thirty years and we would come into our own, chart our path, to some extent similar to that of western man, but in other ways, perhaps very different. The west was to serve as an example, but not forever. That does not seem to have been Vivekananda's idea.

Our people got stuck because, I think, we are too literal. Whether it is Vivekananda or Mahatma Gandhi or someone else, we seem to take them too literally; something has happened to us.

Maybe, this is a much older trait. It may be that Vasco da Gama and the British and partly the Islamic period – all this could have made a contribution to the degradation, the loss of faith, the loss of courage –added to it. Is it of our own making, or is this what happens eventually to all civilisations and maybe they have a new birth at some other stage?

Claude: Would the West be of any help today?

Dharampal: We can get out of this only on our own.

There are examples of people growing more and more inwards and I think this is what the Indian people have done. They have shrunk into themselves, the ordinary Indian, because even with one meal a day or half a meal, the way he lives in shacks, without much water, with very little fuel, because of his environment and also his world-view, he could survive. He

must have devised a way – as civilisations have a knack of doing – that in adverse times, you reduce, you shrink into yourselves and you think of something else and distance yourself from your larger society, and your goal becomes some other goal, non-societal, non-material, that keeps you going.

But it seems that we have over the past ten to twelve generations forgotten how to get out of this shrunken state and return to normality. Perhaps it has become a habit and perhaps because whenever our people tried to come out of it, in a very short time, they got another beating and their experience may be that such effort will not do. So, they become diffident about it. So they have sort of retired from life.

But the spark remains and hence the possibility is there. Now, if they are to be brought into social life, into the running of society – taking it into their own hands, they would only come out of it for something which is worthwhile, which is do-able. If it is not do-able, then they would not. Normality would return when the communities and groups are allowed to have control over their lives, resources and decisions.

Claude: What about the westernised class?

Dharampal: Those who have become westernized - the western type of commodities may be used by a very large number of people, but those whose minds have been westernissed -1 think are not more than half a percent of us. Probably less, basically not more than half a million people – the officer class in the European sense of the term, which could mean scholars, administrators, army personnel, high dignitaries, managers of industry, etc. And those who are completely lost, among these half a million wouldn't be very many, maybe a few thousand or so – the rest I think can be brought back by a movement backed by spirit and courage and hope.

Such a movement, however, has to be of much greater dimensions and inner energy than even the freedom movement under Mahatma Gandhi. It may not be pan-India, it could be initially a regional thing, because if we are going to wait for the spark to be all over India, then we would be waiting for many generations. The spark may arise in some comer of Tamil Nadu or in Bihar or anywhere, or in areas where movements like that of *Swadhyaya* have made visible impact during the past three to four decades, wherever there is this feeling of 'What happened to us', 'We have got lost', 'Let's stand up, do something.'

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The Common Grounds of Slavery and Modern Science

[Expanded version of a paper written for a seminar on "The Crisis of Modern Science" in Malaysia, November 1986]

The movement of ideas is as old as the history of man. It is also probable that taking the total context into account the impact of such movements has not been too dissimilar in different epochs. Thus, it may be found that in the period which followed Gautama Buddha, or during the ascendancy of pre-Christian Rome, or after the spread of Islam into Spain and other parts of Europe, the ideas which emanated from them manifested fairly similar tendencies and impacts on those who were affected by them as are felt today by those who receive modern western ideas and knowledge systems.

Gun-powder, the printing press, the mariner's compass are said to have been introduced into Europe during the thirteenth and fourteenth century. While their introduction might have brought many blessings to Europe in the long run, initially their introduction must have been very unsettling both to European society and its knowledge and state systems. The import of Indian cotton textiles is said to have disrupted the production of English cloth in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As is well documented, even the introduction of the practice of inoculation against the small-pox, from Turkey into England around 1720, was for many decades a matter of vehement opposition and medical and theological controversy in Britain.

Similar strains must have been felt in England and West Europe at the introduction of the drill plough and other agricultural implements, or of new processes of metallurgy, or of new plants and herbs, or of unknown astronomical data and theory.

However, the learning of the art of plastic surgery first observed by the British in the city of Pune, India, in the 1790s, or their discovery of the

existence and the use to which oil-wells were put to in Burma, again in the 1790s, do not seem to have created any immediate social disturbance. Their impact and importance today requires little comment.

From the thirteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century, western Europe was a recipient of innumerable ideas and techniques from the rest of the world, especially from the world of Asia. It is possible, as is generally claimed, that some of these ideas, etc., had earlier originated in Europe itself but were lost to it in the early centuries of the Christian era. Whatever may have been their original source, it can well be imagined that when these ideas, techniques, etc., were first introduced into Europe, they not only gave rise to controversy and debate but their adoption and extension in their original or modified form, must have to a lesser or greater degree, disrupted some aspects of European life. Yet, despite such controversies and disruption, their adoption seems to have led Europe, as a geographical and ethnic area, from a sense of strength to strength.

What European civilisation has produced in the past few centuries, may have created numerous, perhaps even some insoluble problems for itself, but what is termed as "the crisis in modern science" – the theme of this international seminar – is really the crisis which modern science has produced for the non-European world. For Europe, despite the great breast-beating about widespread pollution and ecology, etc., (much of it might be heart-felt and sincere), modern science as such seems to have produced no new crisis. What perhaps can be said is that for the past many centuries Europe has generated crisis after crisis in its vast adventure in the non-European world.

The Third World has been facing imposed crises of one kind or another for nearly four hundred to five hundred years, i.e. from about the time it began to be dominated by European power, organisational skills, strategies, etc. These crises were much more acutely felt, not only because they greatly disrupted and impoverished the areas of the Third World, but also because they involved the wholesale elimination of the indigenous civilisations of the Americas, and many other lands. If I may say so, the Third World today has nearly reached the stage when this process of induced crises seems to be reaching its end.

It is the power and glitter of modern western science and technology which can claim to have captivated, in fact paralysed, the minds of men like Jawaharlal Nehru and of the present-day Third World intellectual. However this glitter is quite recent, not even a century old. Essentially the

way power has been wielded by the West during the last few centuries and the manner in which, and the areas over which, such power has been expanded, is what may be termed as the West's secret. And it is this secret which has in turn produced the present-day western science and technology. It seems to me that the roots of European power and thus also of its science and technology, lie in its philosophy and biblical assumptions. Europe's geography and its requirements made it opt for hierarchical systems in every sphere and these form the basis of Europe's seemingly endless power.

The concentration of material power seems to have been the primary aim of European civilisation from ancient times. It is this aim which has constantly determined the structure of all that it has created through the centuries and the manner in which its own people were treated and governed. The manner in which Europe later dealt with the people of the non-European world had already been well tried in Europe, and perhaps more so in England, much before Europe discovered the Americas, or the sea routes to the East. That Europe had generally subscribed from the days of antiquity to the slogans of liberty, equality and fraternity amongst all human beings is a fallacy perpetuated by nineteenth century radical and liberal thought and pretensions.

It is probable that most civilisations throughout history have been largely indifferent even towards contemporary civilisations. It also seems true that most of them have treated not only those belonging to other civilisations, but even many of their own people, at certain periods, with indifference and in a callous manner. That many people were made slaves through military conquest or by other means by most civilisations, is borne out by history.

But the single-mindedness which has been applied to enslaving vast populations seems altogether to be a European phenomenon. One recalls not only the phenomenal enslavement of vast populations, and the commerce in slavery in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; what happened in ancient Greece or in early Rome, was relatively on the same scale as the later European commerce in millions of people from black Africa, referred to by Femand Braudel as "royal merchandise". While Plato is said to have condemned harshness towards the slaves, he is stated to have encouraged the feeling of contempt for them as a class. In Athens and other Greek democracies "unskilled labour was almost entirely slave-labour, and skilled labour was largely so".

In due time, while slavery declined, feudalism took over. The explanations for the origin of feudalism are many, and a matter of controversy. The consolidation of feudalism in England was evidently a result of the Norman Conquest of England in the mid-eleventh century. Elsewhere the rise of feudalism might have been due to a variety of causes including, as is claimed by Karl Marx and even more so by Frederick Engels and others, major changes in technology. However the role played by slavery in Europe was henceforth played by vast populations which were given the status of serfs, villeins, etc. The consolidation of power thus went apace with the increase of wealth amongst those who wielded such power. The marriage of wealth with power in Europe in time gave rise to the building of manor houses, ships, the accumulation of capital, etc.

World conquest led to the industrialisation of Europe. It is fairly certain that there would have been no industrialisation of the kind which happened from the end of the eighteenth century without such conquest. Many of the new discoveries, technologies, etc., were demanded by the requirements of conquest. The oft-made claim that wars help the growth and advancement of science and technology seems largely to be based on the European experience of the past few centuries.

Modern science, thus, is in direct line to European slavery, feudalism, Europe's world conquest and plunder, and the continuing dominance of the West. While today's West may superficially seem like quite another planet in contrast to what it had been for over 2,000 years, its basic character has remained fairly constant. Mahatma Gandhi was once told that, "Every American had thirty-six slaves, for the machine did the work of thirty-six slaves". This certainly was a vast improvement on European antiquity when the right number of slaves necessary for a Greek citizen was said to be sixteen. In the 1930s, every, or most, Americans enjoyed the privileges of citizenship, and at least as a statistical average, had more than double the energy and services at their command compared to the small minority who enjoyed the status of citizens in ancient Greece. Human slaves of course had long disappeared even in America but the idea had not, and had in fact become even more attractive. Incidentally Mahatma Gandhi's reply was, "Well, Americans may need that, but not we. We cannot industrialise ourselves, unless we make up our minds to enslave humanity."

To put it crudely, western civilisation tends to devour all that exists not only for its survival but seemingly because of a long acquired appetite.

It is not that European civilisation is unaware of this tendency and that

all this has happened in a state of absent mindedness. In fact at times Europe has even made efforts to reform itself but the reformation in a civilisational sense, seems at best only to be able to change or reverse direction, but has no effect on the single-minded characteristic of Europe to its commitment to limitless consolidation of power.

The morphology and purposes of modern science therefore remain more or less identical to the purposes of Europe's slave society in antiquity, to its feudalism, and to the manner of its world conquest.

The myths about modern science and technology prevalent in the Third World are nothing new. Over forty years ago, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, (the first Prime Minister of free India) had observed, "I am all for tractors and big machinery." He was of the view that, "The economy based on the latest technical achievements of the day must necessarily be the dominating ones. If technology demands the big machine, as it does today in a large measure, then the big machine with all its implications and consequences must be accepted."

A decade earlier, he was even more trenchant and had stated in his Autobiography, "I have no doubt, personally, that all efforts, Hindu or Muslim, to oppose modern scientific and industrial civilisation are doomed to failure, and I shall watch this failure without regret."

Pandit Nehru was indeed a man of perception, his nationalism was unquestionable, and he was proud to be an Asian, and to belong to the Third World. Yet, despite his familiarity with the West, and notwithstanding his realisation of the awesome historical impact of western civilisation, his fascination with the products of modern science and technology and his belief in their benign capacity remained limitless. And as we know, however, Pandit Nehru, despite deep differences, was also for twenty-five years a close follower of Mahatma Gandhi.

It will be generally agreed that till today there had not been a greater known critic of modern western civilisation and its statecraft as well as its science and technology than Mahatma Gandhi. What seems to have disturbed Mahatma Gandhi most during his early contact with Europe, was the manner in which the civilisation of Europe, especially of Britain, treated its own people, how it eroded their individual dignity as human beings, how it subordinated them to powerful hierarchical systems, rather than the damage done by Europe to his own country. The latter he could oppose as a patriot but the former violated his humanity. It is this former aspect

which seems to have decided for him that his own country and anyone else who would listen to him should have nothing to do with such a civilisation at any stage. Yet, he failed to impart this understanding to men like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

Obviously, the elite as well as the rulers of the Third World are captivated, even awe-struck by modern science. Its glitter fascinates them and the power it generates and consolidates, makes them take steps to imitate what the world leaders and proprietors of modern science do. But to believe that they are all taken in by the rhetoric and myths of modern science, is to do them injustice. Fifty years ago this may have been true. But today, at least in countries like India, it is the internal as well as the external compulsions of the situation, and the relative intellectual incapacity to create contrasting but fascinating alternatives, which seem to push today's Third World intellectual or those who are entrusted with the task of national management, towards modern science and even more fatally towards the organisational forms and arrangements which invariably seem to accompany it.

Bemoaning the evils of modern science may to some extent provide moral support to the current questioning of it in the West. But it seems more than probable that the type of questioning which goes on today, in so far as it merely points out some of its obvious flaws, makes modern science even more powerful. Seeking non-western alternatives to it, however, requires an exercise at least of the order, that Mahatma Gandhi undertook for the regaining of India's freedom.

The alternatives which the Third World will have to create to modern western science will obviously differ from one area, or region of the Third World to another. Geographically, the Third World is vast and embraces a variety of climates, fauna and flora and is inhabited with people of different ethnic origins. The differences and variations amongst the people of the Third World are even more marked in terms of history. What unites them most today is the fact that all the constituents of the Third World have been dominated by European civilisation since about 1500 A.D. But even this European dominance has been felt in different ways, and for varying periods by practically each area and on some it has sat far more heavily than on others. What can be said to be common to all the Third World areas is that their ordinary people have been deprived of their human dignity, their individual and social initiative has been eroded, their societies disrupted, their environment variously damaged, their productions and

economies made dependent on those of the European world, their elite to a greater or lesser extent alienated from their own people and civilisation, and large proportions of their people greatly impoverished. Therefore the objective which can be said to be common to all of them will be to somehow overcome this historical disorientation and establish a new balance in their respective societies so that each one of them begins to regain its dignity and self-identity and yet be able to maintain a certain fraternity, perhaps even solidarity, with the rest of mankind. The details of the process which will overcome such disorientation will obviously vary from area to area. But, perhaps, it may be worthwhile to speculate how this may possibly be attempted in some specific area, say for instance in India.

Before it came under European dominance India had a prosperous agriculture as well as a flourishing and varied industrial complex. The productivity of India's agriculture was at least three times that of English agriculture even till around 1800 A.D., and as an example of its industrial complex around this time India seemed to have had the potential to produce about 1,00,000 tons of high grade steel annually.

It is true that during the previous six hundred to eight hundred years, i.e. from around 1000 A.D. to 1700 A.D., large parts of northern and western India had been over-run by foreign invaders. Such invasions, and the political domination of these areas by the invaders had led to much strife, to occasional plunder of the rural as well as the urban areas, and far more, to religious intolerance. But though considerably weakened because of the de-linking of state and society, as the two began to function according to unrelated concepts and principles, by and large, Indian society and its manners had more or less stayed intact even in the areas politically dominated by the invaders. While tremors of these invasions were felt from time to time in most parts of India, in more than half of India, individual, social and political life continued to function according to indigenous norms from very ancient times till about the later years of the eighteenth century. Hence it was these areas of India that put up far greater resistance, from about 1750 to 1850 A.D., to European expansion in India.

The innovativeness and vitality of these southern and central areas, even today, because of a differing historical experience, in that, they had continued to be free till about 1750 to 1800, is therefore, much more marked than of most parts of northern India. And because of their rootedness and vitality these areas seem to be much less swayed by European manners and fashions, and are able to use western knowledge systems for their

own purposes more effectively.

Given the historical background of prosperous agriculture and a vast industrial infrastructure it may be right as well as feasible – despite the decline, destruction and depression of the past two hundred years –that India, by stages, reverts to its earlier productive and economic arrangements at least in the spheres of articles of staple consumption. This would imply the deliberate elimination of socially as well as ecologically and technologically harmful practices of production as well as of seeds, plants and materials which have been forced upon India in the past century and a half and more so in the past few decades. Production will again have to be geared to the requirements of the inhabitants of India, living in the countryside as well as in the urban conglomerations and not governed and controlled by sheer market forces, or the requirements of international trade. Not that India need stop international trading altogether or neglect those who live in its growing metropolises and large cities. Besides the change in the production techniques, etc., the other change will have to be a change in the priority of supply. The locality, where production takes place, will, as earlier on, have to have the first claim on the produce instead of the increasing trend determined and controlled by market forces whereby all produce becomes marketable and thus the producing locality is actually starved of what it produces, and the nature of the produce is so changed that only such things which are marketable get produced at all. Arrangements naturally will be made that the non-producing areas receive a proportionate share of all produce either from within the region where they are situated or from a national or some other larger pool. A densely populated country like India cannot be considered as the supplier of food and other primary products to other countries except in a very marginal sense. It would be foolish for it, or its political managers, even to contemplate such a step. Any marginal supply to other countries, say for instance of tea, or cotton, or iron ore, or coal could be considered only when there are real surpluses, as of dairy produce in today's western Europe, or the amount of the primary product like iron ore or coal is in such quantities that it is believed that it will never be exhausted.

Articles of food, clothing, building material for houses and other public structures, forest produce and herbs, and such articles, which in a participative way enliven and enrich India's cultural and civilisational expressions, will be the exclusive preserve of the indigenous productive and economic arrangements. Even if such arrangements mean some reduction of

production in certain; fields it would be more than compensated by the improvement in the quality of the product and of the encouragement to aesthetic sensibility so characteristic of the older India, but lost in recent times.

This move, however, need not imply a rigid adherence to old forms. What is basic to the old forms is the conceptual frame from which these forms were derived, and the interrelationship which existed earlier on between the individual and the group, on the one hand, and amongst different groups, on the other. It is such relationship which constituted the core of India's polity and guided and directed India's institutional and structural arrangements. Assuming that such inter-relationship is considered precious, after due deliberation, by India's people, and not just by its elite, even today, and it is restructured or restored and the conceptual frame, which determined what Indians considered as desirable, became functional again then any selective borrowings from the present day world or other civilisations will do little injury. They may in fact be beneficial in the same way as the introduction of the mariner's compass, paper, printing, etc. were beneficial to Europe.

But food, clothing, housing, the accompaniments of culture, though basic are not the only requirements of any society today. For instance, India has been accustomed to a large network of rail transport for a century or more, to a wide network of postal and telegraphic services, and recently to telephones, to newspapers, journals and books, to motor transport by road, to radio and more recently to television, and to air transport. (Incidentally it is this latter mode of travel which has made this international seminar possible in the same way as it makes possible the holding of thousands upon thousands of international conferences and seminars, meetings between top people who are said to run the world, and a whole amount of international junketing by people who may not be so great and may not hold the destiny of the world in their palms.) It is possible, at least in theory, to give up most of this and whatever transport and communications was still thought essential, to be performed by other and slower means. Such a change in itself will be healthy both for society and the individual. But in the circumstances of today any drastic alterations in the fields of transport and communications, even when their overwhelming use is restricted as at present to between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of India's people, may not be feasible. However, a detailed and in-depth examination from an Indian perspective of these twin fields is long overdue. Such an

examination may also suggest feasible alterations and the ways and means by which these could be brought.

Another instance can be concerning the requirements of energy. At present, the energy field in India is dependent on animal draught-power, coal, fuel-wood and charcoal – though less and less on fuel-wood and charcoal as more and more of Indian forests are being denuded or are being replaced by species of trees like Eucalyptus. Again about 80 per cent to 90 per cent of India's people receive very little of the energy available, and a substantial proportion of them are virtually starved of all sources of energy supply, except of course of sunshine, at least so far. Ordinarily, the requirements of energy in a sunny country like India should be far less than in those which are less fortunate with regard to heat and light from the sun. But to be able to take advantage of such a fortunate geographical situation, the habitats of India, and the daily routine of life (greatly damaged and disoriented since about 1800) has to be such that it is easily capable of benefiting from such natural advantage. But till the habitats, the daily life, etc., get remodeled, it is necessary for India, even within the larger present dispensation, to reallocate the energy it has, and taking advantage of sunshine use it through various devices for production of energy necessary for domestic uses as well as for production processes and other public purposes.

Where inter-relationship with the world was the primary objective, India, much like other areas of the Third World would need to take a variety of steps. The first of these has to be to suggest a better and viable alternative to the current relationships based primarily on the use of force which dominate today's world. Mahatma Gandhi tried to convince the world of the desirability of a nonviolent world order and also of social and individual life based and guided by the principles of self-control. His advice was listened to by many throughout the world but did not get adopted in any large way. New attempts with the same objective but perhaps with somewhat different constituents and more elaborate in its details need to be made and India could be one of the countries which could help in such attempts. But till such attempts succeed, India, like other countries, will, by the logic of circumstances, have to pay at least the necessary minimum attention to its own security, and maintain or create such structures which are conducive to this end. This may also make it essential for India to be as knowledgeable and innovative about such aspects of the building and holding together of material power as are required in today's world.

So far, countries like India seem either to have resisted the intervention of modern western scientific and technological know-how in their individual and public life, or have welcomed it with open arms, without any apparent thought. Both have led to failure though in different ways. In the state of mental and spiritual confusion which has been a characteristic of countries like India – since they began to feel the impact of European military, political and intellectual domination – this failure perhaps was inevitable. The power of this impact has been of such dimensions that even the close followers of Mahatma Gandhi, or most of the institutions which were created under his inspiration could not but imitate, though unconsciously, the ways of their adversary. This is reflected in the manner institutions and organisations got organised, the hierarchical patterns which they adopted, the rules and regulations which began to govern them, all mostly drawn from and inspired by the state system which the British created in India. Even in the technological field, where all of Mahatma Gandhi's emphasis was on an indigenous aesthetic, on manual labour and on increased self-reliance, even those who believed in and administered this programme have ultimately been reduced to an imitation of a scaled-down and out-dated western technology – renamed intermediate or appropriate technology – and have been more or less cut off from the roots and the moorings of their own society. The adoption of what is called the amber-charkha (a reduced hand-driven replica of the spindle in a cotton textile mill) in place of the ancient Indian cotton spinning wheel is one of the more vulgar representations of such departure.

To enable it to strike its own path, and also to be of some benefit to the rest of the Third World or to the world at large, a country like India has to comprehend its own past and its concepts and priorities as well as India's present reality. In addition, it has to know the world, and especially the civilisation of Europe, as well as it can. Such self-awareness and the knowledge of the larger environment amidst which they function, are crucial for countries like India to overcome what this seminar has termed "the crisis of modern science".

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World Council for Satyagraha

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In recent years ideas of non-violent action by boycott, *satyagraha* and other expressions of non-violent resistance have been discussed in various places. Concurrently, the method of *satyagraha* has been mooted to challenge nuclear tests. This idea is being considered in places as wide apart as Britain, Japan, USA and India. But most of these efforts are unconnected and unorganised. At the same time, present-day conflicts arise so precipitately and are so far-reaching that these efforts have no appreciable effects upon the tragic course of events.

Gandhiji's Example

In the modern age, Mahatma Gandhi has been the supreme exponent of non-violence and *satyagraha*, to counteract tyranny and enslavement. He successfully demonstrated its relevance and its effectiveness in relation to the international problems of a country. The freedom of India, the relative lack of bitterness between India and Britain after 1947, and the solution – at least partial – of untouchability and other Indian social problems, are living symbols. Today its effectiveness is amply demonstrated in Montgomery (Alabama) and Johannesburg, or by the achievements of the Bhoodana movement in India.

But during Gandhiji's lifetime practically the whole of his time and energy, and of those around him, were of necessity devoted to the problems of one country. The problems around him were so immediate and overwhelming that there was no opportunity of testing the technique of non-violent direct action against international strife and aggression.

India achieved independence, and shortly after that he was gone. Thus it is probably lack of experience and precedent that renders our own efforts in that direction so halting and, for the most part, stillborn. In a recent

statement on the nuclear tests, Shri Rajagopalachari said, "How I wish Gandhiji were alive in thi scritical hour in world history. He would not have hesitated to throw India into this supreme battle..." And indeed, all of us who are moved by Gandhiji'sapproach to life feel this sense of being unequal to the task of combating the tragedy around us.

Nevertheless, it is also true that the spark of his life has not left us unaffected. In various countries there are organisations and groups which propagate and practice the philosophy of non-violence. There are organisations like the SCI (Service Civil International, British branch, International Voluntary Service for Peace), the Friends Service Units, the Ramakrishna Mission, Associations for War on Want and others, which try to translate the idea of world brotherhood into practice.

But we are living in no ordinary times. Fundamental changes are taking place throughout the world; socio-political transformations are a continuous phenomenon. Also, the very impact of these events on a rather stupefied and psychologically unprepared mankind itself produces further strife and suffering.

The need for united effort

In the face of all these explosive situations, it is of extreme importance that all who believe in the efficacy of non-violent action in relation to international problems should unite in a concerted effort. The organisation of a World Council for Non-violent Resistance would be an appropriate beginning. A permanent organisation of this kind, drawing its members from various countries, individually and through any organisations which subscribe to this concept, could act as a clearing-house for ideas of direct non-violent action, and for informing and educating world opinion.

It often so happens that with every catastrophe our anger and shame tend to induce frustration and impotence. This in turn engenders the feeling that problems of power, if soluble at all, can only be solved by the exercise of political and military authority and technique. To break out of this impasse is the most urgent need of our age. The greater, therefore, is the need for unity and concerted action by those who hold the vision of the true path to peace.

26

Rediscovering the Russian Self

[Written in Madras, September 19, 1990. Also published in PPST Bulletin]

A recent issue of Moscow News (No: 31, 1990) has announced the reprinting in the U.S.S.R of Vekhi (Landmarks) first published in Russia in 1909. Its joint authors were Nikolai Berdayev, Sergei Bulgakov, Mikhail Ghershenzov, Alexander Izhghoyev, Bodan Kistyakovsky, Pyotr Starve, and Semyan Frank. According to Moscow News V. I. Lenin termed it "An Encyclopaedia of Liberal Renegacy", and A. Solzhenitsyn, "A Message from the Future." The reprint is of 50,000 copies by Novosti Publishers and is priced 60 kopecks. The seven authors believed that "class struggle and social revolution were catastrophic for society." According to them, "Atheist materialism, political radicalism and violence, nihilism with respect to absolute values, maximalism of social and ethnic demands and utter disdain of individual interests were the characteristic features of democratic and socialist ideology which brought Russian society into deadlock."

According to Moscow News, "To oppose such ideology, the seven thinkers put forward their own positive program which envisaged, in particular, that the democratic intelligentsia should take up responsibility for what was happening. They insist on self-improvement of the individual on the basis of religious and cultural values." Novosti Publishers are also to reprint a sequel to Vekhiby the same authors, first published in Moscow in 1918, and titled From the Depths: Articles About Russian Revolution.

According to Alexander Tsipko (Moscow News 26, 1990), "No other publication in the Russian language can improve on Landmarks for its concentration of prophecies and ideas. Having brought together contributions by the most brilliant representatives of liberal and democratically minded Russian thinkers, this collection was labelled by Lenin the 'Encyclopaedia of Russian Renegacy'. In fact, it is a book about our bloody post-revolutionary history written long before the revolution. Landmarks foretold October

1917 in 1909. It also wrote about the Red terror and Stalin's terror, and about collectivisation." Tsipko adds, "No other book can give you a better insight into the Russian mind and soul. No other book can give you greater confidence in Russia's intellectual potential."

Elsewhere (Moscow News 24, 1990) Tsipko observes that, "The idea of socialism, or of the socialist choice, can no longer cement the country's centre. Only a centrist, general democratic ideology can strengthen the centre and bring together the extreme points of view. The future of Russia depends on solving this problem.

"Take the situation inside the Party. Understandably, the CPSU platform with its declarations of fidelity to socialist choice and to Lenin's principles of Party organisation is unable to unite anybody. To unite the reformers with the democratic forces will require fundamental human values, the assertion of the primacy of democracy, progress, the rights, freedoms and dignity of the individual, universal human values." According to Tsipko, "Marxism did not maintain that the individual was valuable in and of himself," and "so we can do without Marx and his ideas of scientific communism."

But the Vekhiof 1909, or the sequel to it published in 1918, were not the last reservations on the Russian Revolution of October 1917, or the solitary expression of foreboding on the future to come. Forebodings of this future were powerfully expressed, among others, by E. Zamyatin in We published outside the USSR in 1924 and by A. Platonov in Chevengur (USSR: Social Sciences Quarterly Review, (SSQR), No. 1, 1990, pp. 141-162). In a large way these Russian writings of the 1920s seem to have inspired Aldous Huxley to write Brave New World, and Geroge Orwell to write 1984. We and Chevengurhave also recently been reprinted in the USSR.

According to SSQR, "throughout (Zamyatin's) novel runs his persistent thought about what happens when all render obeisance to the ideal of an absolutely expedient and rational existence. He shows what happens to the individual, the state and the human community when liberty is rejected for the sake of this ideal, and happiness is equated with servile subordination."

"In Zamyatin's work," observes the SSQR, "we were not the masses but a social quality. Any type of individuality, whatsoever, was excluded in the single state. The very possibility of becoming T and in some way separating from 'We' was crushed. There remained only the faceless, enthusiastic mob

which was easily moulded to the iron will of the Benefactor. The cherished idea of Stalinism was to transform the individual into a 'bolt' in the vast machine of state which was controlled by the firm hand of its engineer or driver. Zamyatin showed this idea in practice."

The SSQR further observes, "Zamyatin is now considered one of those writers who very early recognised the outlines of the totalitarian system soon to become a reality in several different countries." Zamyatin even helped Orwell realise, "the main danger presented by modern civilization: that it demanded a constantly improving technology and valued man least of all."

Platonov's Chevengur"grows out of the upturned reality of the first post-revolutionary years. Having purified life of all 'oppressive elements', the urge to build the road to communism with a single sweep of the hand and make a break with the 'mysteries of time' was no flight of the imagination but a widespread desire" of Lenin and his followers. As a hero of Platonov puts it, "People then wanted to become 'cleverer than reason'." According to a student in Chevengurtheir course teacher told them, "We are stinking pastry but he will make a tasty pie of us."

The metaphor of the ordinary, and not so ordinary people being like 'stinking pastry' to be transformed into a 'tasty pie' by the trainers, the educators, the political cadres and their masters seems to sum up the nature of events which succeeded the capturing of power by Lenin, the great westernizer even more so than the Tsar Peter, and his adherents in Russia. Historically, this was not new to Europe where the Norman conquerors and others had treated people much like 'stinking pastry' and had appropriated all power, resources and wealth into fewer and fewer hands. The main difference seems to be in nomenclature: the 11th century Norman dominance and state structures are classed as feudalism while what happened in post 1917 Russia became state socialism. The other difference may have been that the Normans, etc. did not even aspire to convert the 'stinking pastry' into a 'tasty pie'. They perhaps knew that such conversion could never be made. According to European scholars ancient Sparta was one of the historical models of state socialism. The number of Perioeci (those inseparably bound with the body of the state) and Helots (those without any protection of law) in B.C. 371 Sparta are estimated to be 40,000 to 60,000 and 140,000 to 200,000 respectively in a total population of 190,000 to 270,000 (V. Ehrenberg: The Greek State, Methuen, 1969, pp 31 -32)

Thus the State which emerged in post 1917 Russia and the few who controlled it, not only appropriated all power, resources and wealth to itself but Russian society also was 'absorbed, processed and assimilated by the state'. (Moscow News, 21, 1990). According to L. Karpensky, "The meaning of statisation consists in the concealed transformation of public property as personified by the state into the private property of the nomenclature, the state's administrative power." In such a context it was natural that Lenin directed the appropriation of all sources and wealth and even a calamity like the Russian famine of the 1920s in which more than 30 million people are officially said to have suffered, became an opportunity and excuse to seize the wealth of the Russian orthodox Christian church. In March 1922, he sent a message to Molotov which said, "For you, this moment not only is exceptionally favourable but, in fact, the only moment when we have 99 chances in 100 of utterly defeating the enemy and securing for ourselves the policy, we need for many decades ahead. Today there are instances of cannibalism in famine-stricken areas and the roads are littered with hundreds if not thousands of corpses. We can (and therefore must) seize church valuables with mad and merciless energy never yielding to any resistance." (Moscow News, 32,1990). From this Russian illustration, Indians can well visualise the events leading to the Bengal famine of 1769 and its aftermath, in which one-third of the people perished, and what happened during later Indian famines till 1943-44.

Yet, strangely, in the same way as the people of Russia have somehow survived this 70-year-long holocaust, the Russian church seems to have retained the Russian people's trust. According to a recent survey, the conclusion of it is said to be applicable to the whole of the USSR, 17.5 per cent of the Russian people have complete trust in the church, 46.8 per cent have trust in it, 24.1 per cent do not trust it very much, and 4.8 per cent do not trust it at all. The corresponding proportions for the Government are 4 per cent, 24.3 per cent, 22.5 per cent and 5.4 per cent, and for the CPSU are 33.4 per cent, 37.0 per cent and 17.3 per cent respectively. The trust enjoyed by the armed forces is more than that enjoyed by the church and it is 12.3 per cent, 44.1 per cent, 33.9 per cent and 8 per cent.

It is possible that the above writings and reflections on life and society in the USSR since about 1909, and more so as it existed since 1917, are not the only and even the dominant views which are being debated in the USSR today.

A great debate, however, has been going on in the USSR since about 1955, and though it has had its ups and downs, on the whole it has become more and more vibrant and has so influenced general opinion that ideas and institutions which had been wiped out from the language of the Russian people have come back with, perhaps, greater vigour than these had immediately before 1917. It is possible that what are known as market forces will be determining the future of the USSR for decades to come. But it is conceivable and more probable that the primary factors in the reshaping of the USSR would be its own long past, the forging of the broken links with this past a major aim, without, at the same time, any abandonment of the acquisitions, knowledge, technologies the USSR has acquired during the past 70 years. Nations and people do not easily give up their acquisitions. What they usually do is to find new and less visible and controversial ways and devices to hold what they consider their heritage (however ill gotten) and to build upon it and expand it if possible. The search in the USSR appears to be more for "ethics and compassion" without which "a civilized market and a civilised society" are considered unthinkable (Soviet Literature, No.5, 1990, p. 134). According to a Russian literary critic, "It is we who blithely strayed to the edge of the precipice and we who now are trying to crawl trembling away as can be seen from our publications on philosophy, prose, our poetry at its best and most spiritual, and from today's new literature scouting its way forward into the world of Christianity.

"We are not yet wholly ready to receive this unexpected wealth because we have almost forgotten the words it uses. Estranged from language, which was natural for our own forefathers, we wince at words like Faith, the Devil, Orthodoxy, and God (who can now again be printed with a capital letter). We still haven't got out of the habit of trying to substitute something 'more readily comprehensible' the Ideal, Spirituality, Tradition. The realisation is already dawning, however, that these are not synonyms and that we are going to have to recall our native language in all its fullness. Russia's thought was fully formed and systematised by the 1920s but was forced into emigration, exiled, imprisoned, and buried in 'Special Depositories' before it had time to be heard in all its glory throughout Russia. Now, as if too long deprived of its rightful reader, it suddenly cascades upon him from all directions at once and he drinks it down with grateful and perfect attentiveness, every line of it as alive and topical as the day it was written. Our only problem now is to find the time to mark the margins, gasping in amazement as we impatiently copy out excerpts, to rejoice in thought which

is so completely up to the minute, and to weep that it could not all have been heard long ago. We glory in the penetrating insights and only hope that now at last, when we have paid so dearly, we shall get to hear and understand every last word and that we shall be able to reconcile it all."

And further, "The task of man, of our people, and of mankind is not to dream ineffectually of absolute perfection; no more is it to devote ourselves to the petty-minded and unworthy service of merely mortal ends. It is to bring that which is below into harmony with that which is above. It is to strive actively for the perfection of every aspect of our personal and collective life so that God's will should be done on Earth as it is in Heaven." (Soviet Literature, No.5, 1990, p 150-51).

As we the Indian elite, even those who daily perform long *puja-s* to the Hindu, Muslim or Christian God, seem to have lost the ability to link the various constituents which go into the making of human life and society, such a Russian analysis may not today be comprehensible to us. Yet, if we do not make even an attempt at such understanding, the loss in every way would only be ours. We already are oblivious of what is happening in other parts of the world, and why various people, areas, and societies operate the way they do, and what really makes them tick.

A calm consideration of what has been happening in the USSR and in Eastern Europe, should lead us to reflect about our own situation, to the derailment during 1946-1950 of our aspirations for a rejuvenated India, and the hijacking of the Indian state by the alienated westernisers. Its scale, perhaps, was not as vast as of what happened in the USSR, but possibly it has had much more deadly effect on our people, their society and the heritage on which it was founded, and on the rejection of their skills and creative capacities. Furthermore, it should take us back to our own 1909, when Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi gave utterance to his thoughts and reflections, founded on what he considered as the perennial philosophy and outlook of India in the long dialogue which he termed Hind Swaraj. Despite their different civilisational origins, and differing historical experiences and psychological outlooks, we may yet find that in many essential matters there is much in common between the insights and premonitions of Gandhiji and the Russian philosophers like Berdyayev, and writers like Zamyatin and Platonov, and many others who have reflected on the condition of man in modern or ancient times. Even if some of us have reservations about some of Gandhiji's ideas and actions, such reservations have been around in the air for over 70 years, it would be admitted that irrespec-

tive of all his errors and failures Mahatma Gandhi enabled us and our society to become more courageous, to regain some sense of dignity and that he tried to show us a vision of what he considered during his days as precious in our civilisation. Illustrations of the transformation, he was enabled to bring about are countless. Much like the people of the USSR, and perhaps like most in the modern world, we have also to arise from under the rubble. The only difference may be that if not in actual reality, yet at the level of feeling, thinking and believing, except for brief periods, like the countrywide attempt at indigenous resurgence by localities, regions, and political communities against the intolerable despotism of Delhi and its subedar-s from about 1680-1750 or the sense of freedom and dignity generated during the days of Gandhiji (1916-1948), we may consider ourselves to be buried under such rubble for much longer. But that one can arise from under this rubble is well demonstrated, if not so convincingly by the changes which have come in the world during the past 40-50 years, then at least quite conclusively by what has recently been happening, at unimaginable speed, in Eastern Europe and the USSR.

27

India and the World: Need for Original Research

[Whole of coastal East Africa, coastal Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan; India, Sri Lanka, Burma, countries of South East Asia, China, Korea, Japan and the numerous Islands in the Indian ocean and the China seas region]

[Note by the Author, June 11, 2001]

Once they started to be political and military rulers of large territories, the British began to pay serious attention to ancient Indian texts which interested them. One of them was the *Manusamhita* which they got fully translated into English by about 1790, and which was printed again and again by the British authorities in Bengal during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Translations of books like the Shakuntala by the great Kalidasa were published also as were books on the travels and conquests of Alexander of Greece (early fourth century B.C.), of Megasthenes and others, as also what was assumed to have been said or written about India by the ancient Greeks and Romans like Herodotus, Strabo, etc.

With the passage of time and having achieved a stronger political grip over most of India, the British extended the publication of such material, and by about 1860, had also published various writings of Islamic historians about Islamic rule in India, or English translations or adoptions of ancient Chinese accounts of India dating from the fourth to seventh century A.D. One of the major Chinese account was pertaining to the travels of Yuan Chwang (also known as Hiuen Tsiang) in India during A.D. 629-645. Perhaps it can be assumed that before these publications, such Chinese accounts of India had not been known for centuries, in the scholarly circles of India. It may also be added here that even after the British published them in English, Indian scholars themselves have not yet attempted to republish such accounts in Indian languages directly from the

attempted to republish such accounts in Indian languages directly from the original texts.

Knowledge systems and scholarship are ordinarily accompaniments of political systems and in various ways are governed and shaped by political power. It is all the more so when the political power happens to be of alien origin. This applies as much to countries of Europe and those around the Mediterranean Sea under Roman dominance as it does to countries which have been under Islamic or European dominance in recent centuries.

India for a variety of reasons still continues to be intellectually dominated by the texts, systems and institutions of scholarship established in India during the nineteenth century by the British. A major result of this overbearing influence has been that those who manage and administer Indian politics and institutions not only continue to view India in the way the British viewed it but have also largely lost all awareness of the way India was say before 1500 A.D. or what its relationships were with the lands and people, in its neighbourhood in Asia and eastern lands of Africa bounded by the Indian Ocean and China seas till A.D. 1500. They also seem to have lost consciousness of the fact that while what was imposed on India by the British and the West was alien to its own nature and institutions, but also that what they have been made to forget has been an integral part of the Indian life since the very beginning and would continue to be so forever.

Furthermore, in these days of globalisation and the slogan of 'one world' originating in the United States of America around 1940, it is essential to remember that these slogans are not really very new. They arise from time to time in different areas of the world, as they did in ancient Rome, or the world dominated by China, till some five to six centuries ago. An illustration of it is provided by the Chinese admiral Cheng Ho who for some 30 years (1405-1433) commanded over 300 Chinese warships and was constantly moving between China, Southeast Asia, India, the Iranian and Arab coasts up to Mogadishu (Madagascar) in Africa. It is also said that his fleet of 317 ships and 27,870 men was anchored in the Kerala port of Calicut for four months from Dec 1406 to April 1407. If scholars explore these pre-1500 centuries they should find that similar movements of other ships and navies like that of the Arabs, Indonesians, Indians, and others had been going on in the Indian ocean and Chinese seas region from much earlier than the Christian era. Again in the early 15th century itself there were several embasies from China to Bengal, and such embasies must have been frequenting amongst the numerous Asian lands during the

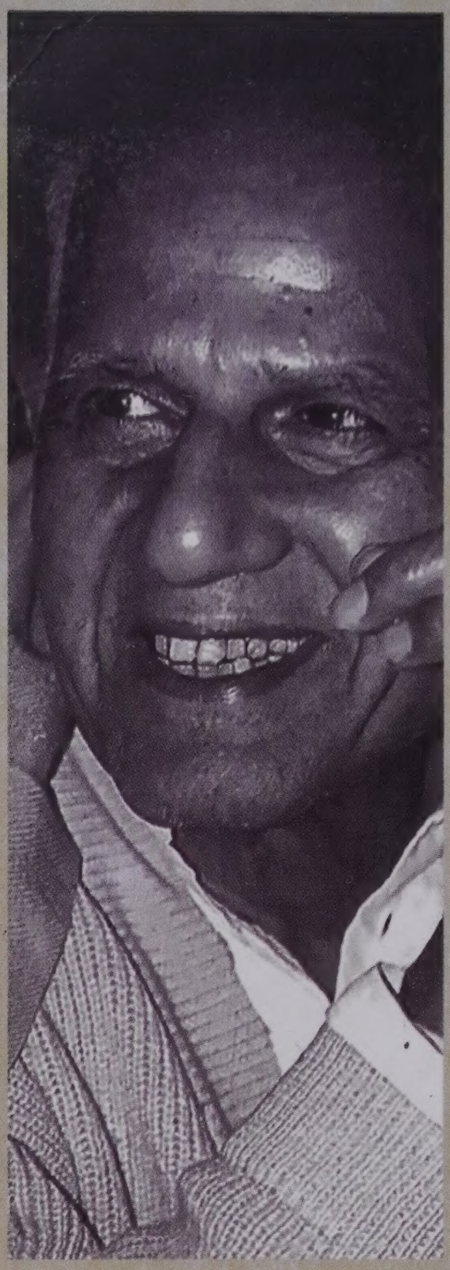
previous centuries. However, within a century of Cheng Ho, European countries and navies specially those of Spain, Portugal, Netherlands, England and France had become dominant in the world. That a similar world-wide alteration in the constitution of world power can happen again is not an impossibility.

In fact, Prof. Samuel P. Huntington of Harvard University must be thanked for drawing attention to such possibilities in his recent book The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order. Time (kala) alone will tell what shape and direction the world will take and the future balance between the various civilisations – European, Chinese, Japanese, the Arabian and Iranian, the Indie, the South-East Asian and the African, after such remaking.

In whatever way the world may reconstitute itself in future it is essential that India regains awareness of its past, history, society, manners, etc. on the one hand and its relationship with the world around it on the other. Such a recovery of knowledge and self-awareness requires a major scholarly effort to work on this past in all its manifestations and detail, say from 1500 A.D. to 600 B.C. Regaining of such knowledge would require search of original sources not only in India, but initially perhaps much more in China, Korea, Japan, S.E. Asia, etc., where such sources seem to be more known and perused by scholars in recent times. We would also have to peruse European and American writings on this period, mostly written since about 1850. The European writings would to some extent be in English, but much more in French, German, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Russian and other European languages. The writings from China, etc., would be in the languages of Asia, the way they were written centuries ago. The scholars required for this effort therefore need to be well acquainted with those languages besides possessing other scholarly abilities. A scholarly effort like this, it may be named a special university, or given some other appropriate name, need not to begin with undertake any teaching. But it should, to the extent possible, be a community of some 30-50 scholars, with a well-endowed library and archives. The works it would publish should be in the more widely known languages of India.

A beginning in this task could be made by a few interested young scholars starting the locating of relevant material, by acquiring as much of it as possible and initiating careful perusal at least of some of it.

Best Wishes.



Dharampal was an accomplished researcher, writer, thinker, sociologist, historian and philosopher. He was a non-conformist for many of the new generations of Indians who have been brought up, with or without their knowledge and consent, on an intellectual and educational diet prepared by the British and the West. But it was his ability to question what looks like obvious, to delve behind it and unravel intriguing and insightful details of Indian history, society and polity, that made Dharampal very special. A Gandhian and long-time associate of Mirabehn and Jayprakash Narayan, the Dharampal flavour is manifest in each of the articles in this collection- rich in research, delectable insight, and revelations which are spicy and invigorating.

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